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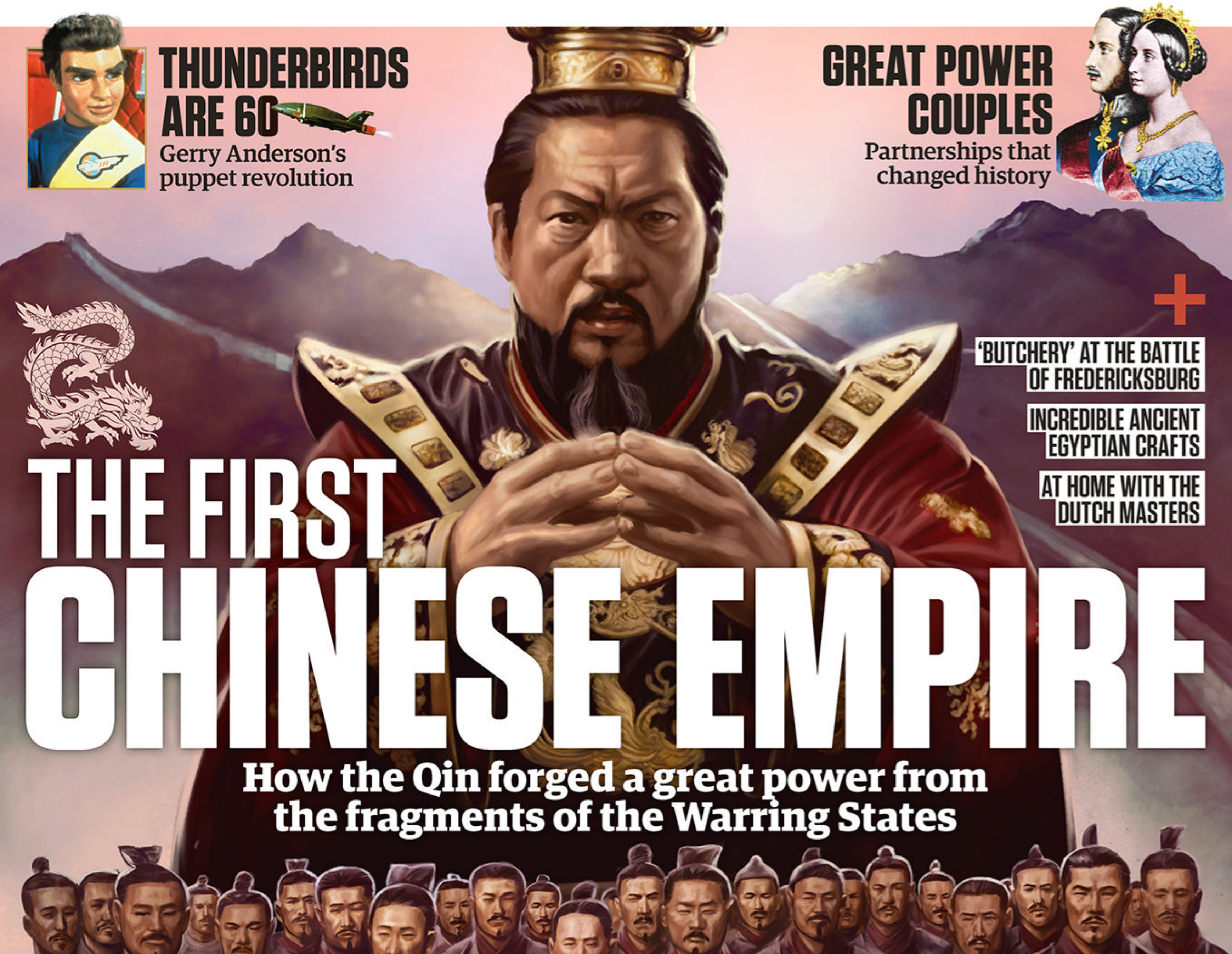

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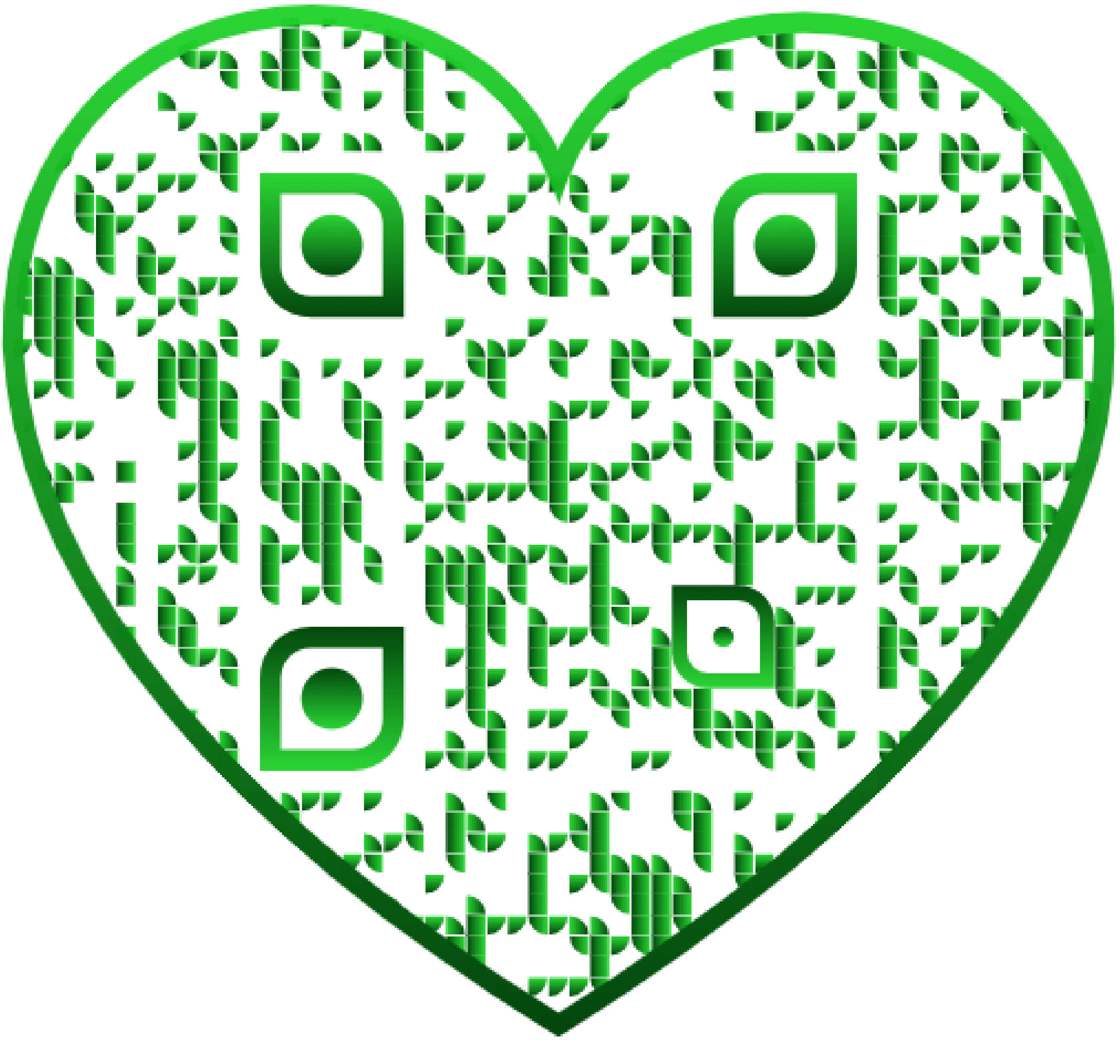

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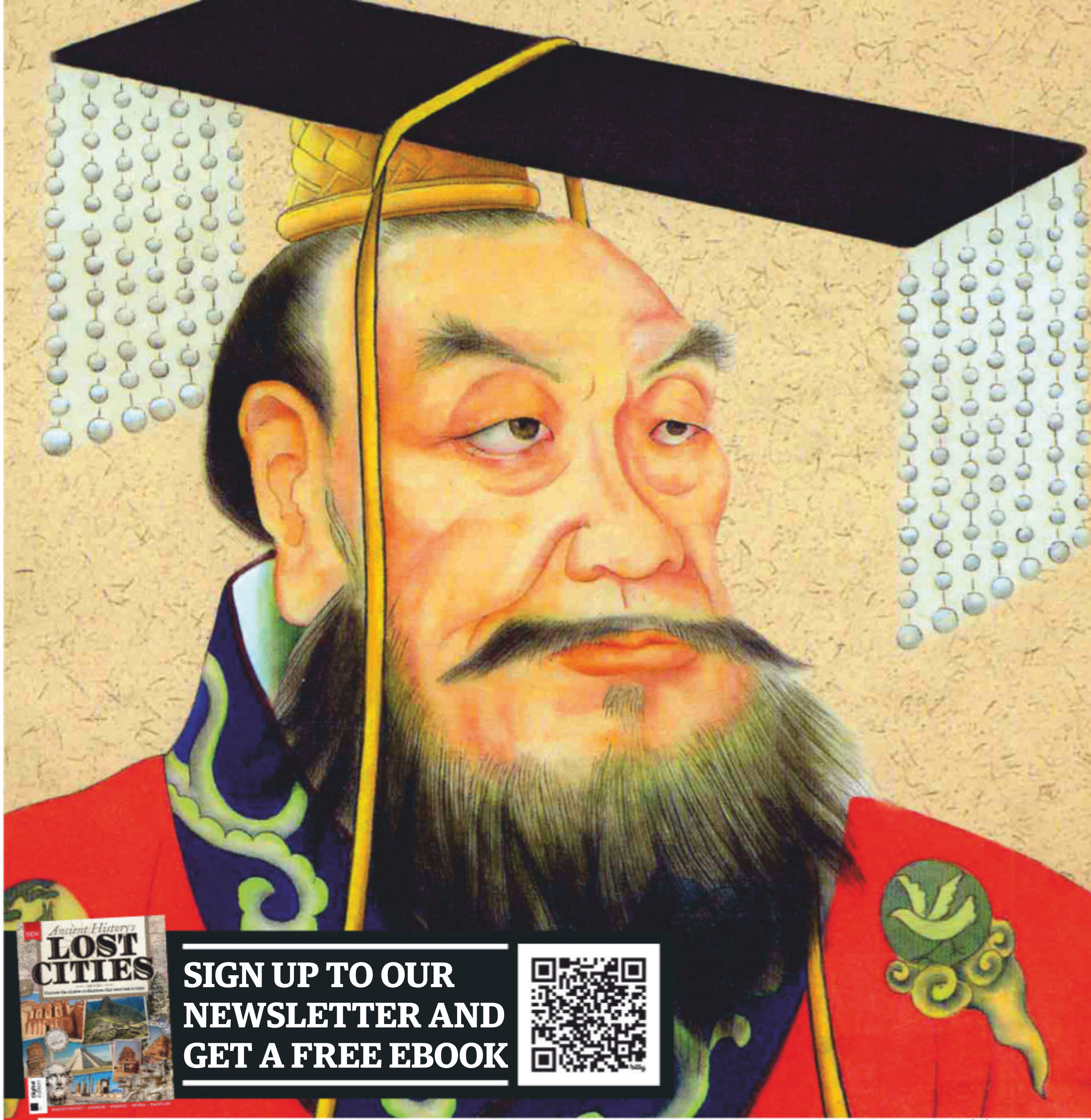

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Qin Shi Huang's rise to emperor started 2,000 years of imperial rule in China

Welcome

How we explore the past can often be rather siloed: treating geographical regions as isolated areas of interest. As such, I always enjoy taking a step back and considering dates from a more global perspective. For instance, our cover subject for this issue is the rise of the Qin dynasty and the first Chinese emperor in 221 BCE, so what else is happening in the world?

The Circus Flaminius is being built in Rome, Ptolemy IV ascends the throne in Egypt and Hannibal is consolidating his control of the Iberian Peninsula. In a couple of years he'll be invading Rome. Meanwhile, the Macedonians have recently reasserted their control of the Hellenic region with victory over Sparta. In China, an empire is born and soon the Great Wall of China's construction will begin.

We welcome Miguel Miranda to offer his insight into the Qin story and how they emerged from the Warring States period. Also this issue, TikTok historian Katie Kennedy reviews history's great power couples, we celebrate 60 years of *Thunderbirds* and David Olusoga explains why Britain is peculiar in its history with guns. As always, I hope you enjoy the issue.

Jonathan Gordon
Editor

Find our social media channels and more at **linktr.ee/AllAboutHistory**

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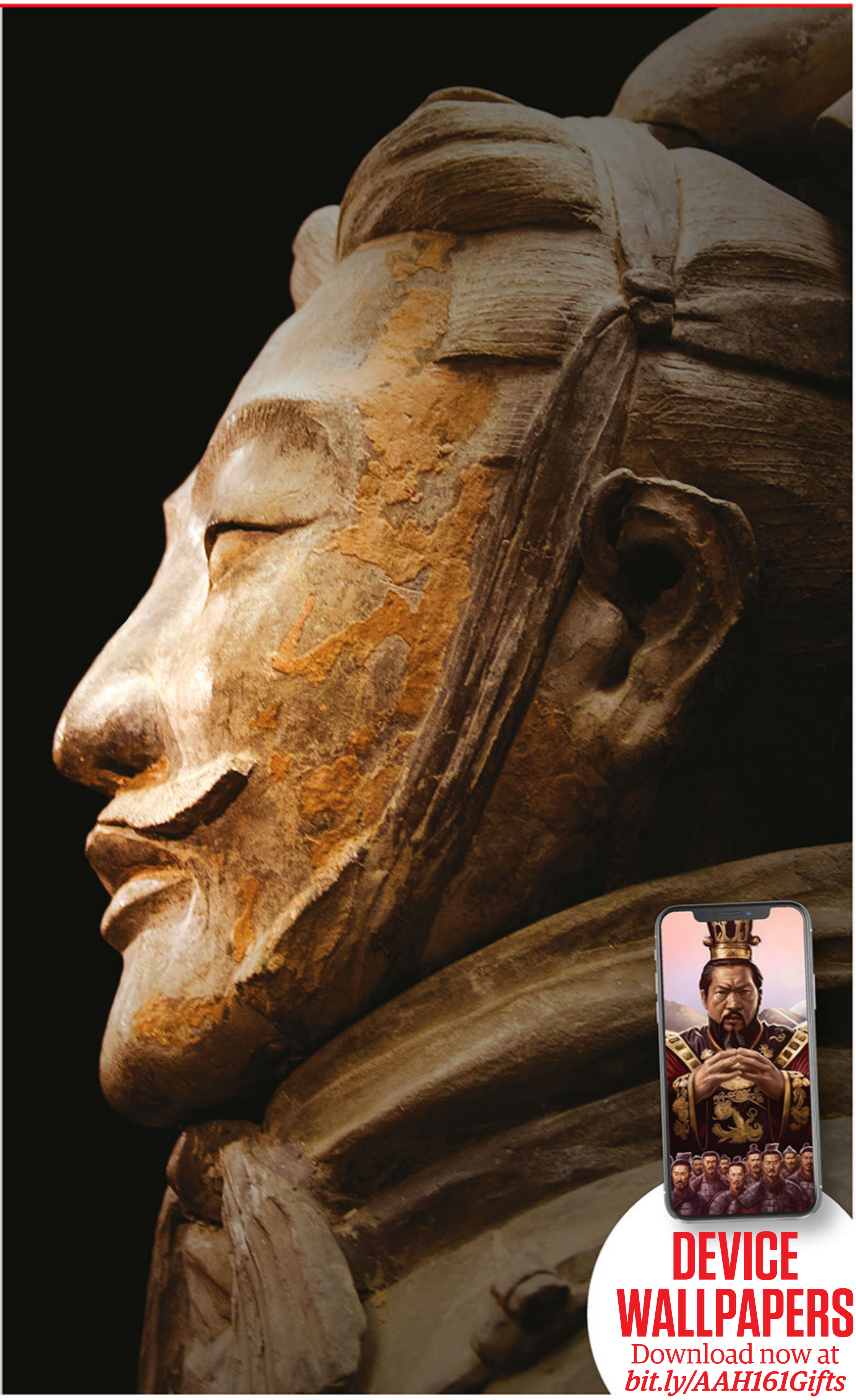

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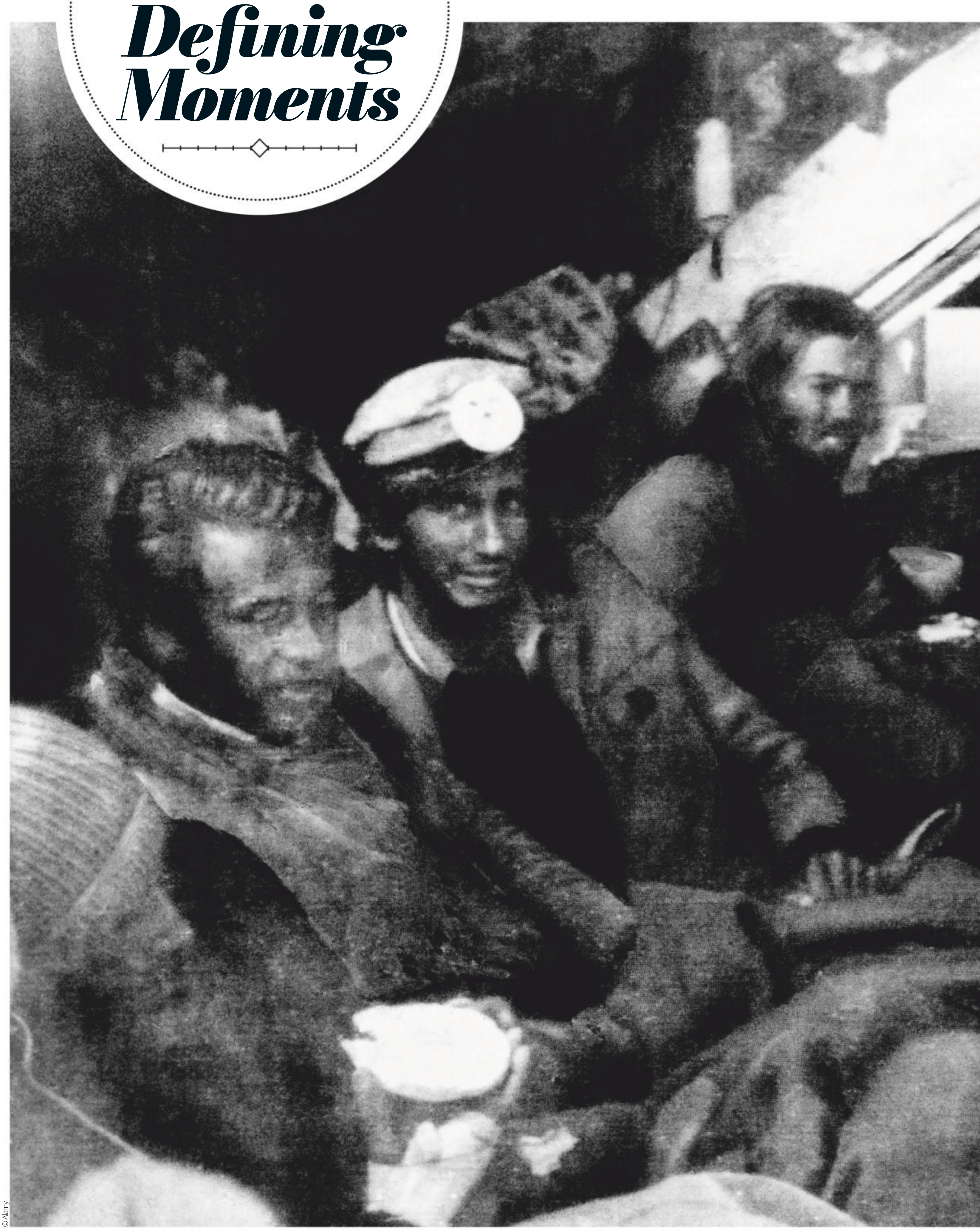
Defining Moments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13 October 1972

CRASH SURVIVORS EAT THE DEAD

While travelling from Montevideo in Uruguay to Santiago in Chile, Uruguayan Air Force Flight 571 crashed in the Andes mountains in Argentina. The aircraft had been chartered by a Uruguayan rugby team and was carrying 45 people when the accident occurred. Twelve passengers died on the impact, with many more perishing over the following days due to the freezing conditions. The incident became infamous after the plane wreckage and 16 survivors were discovered over two months after the crash – they had resorted to cannibalism to survive the 72-day ordeal.

3 October 1995

OJ SIMPSON ACQUITTED

After a high-profile trial that lasted 11 months, football player and actor Orenthal James 'OJ' Simpson was found not guilty of the murders of his ex-wife Nicole Brown and Ron Goldman. The murders, which had been committed in 1994, and the ensuing arrest and court case, were a media sensation and the live broadcast of the verdict was watched on television by an estimated 150 million people. It was described as the "trial of the century".

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ALL ABOUT ISTANBUL

A city known by many names, discover the long and rich history of this extraordinary metropolis

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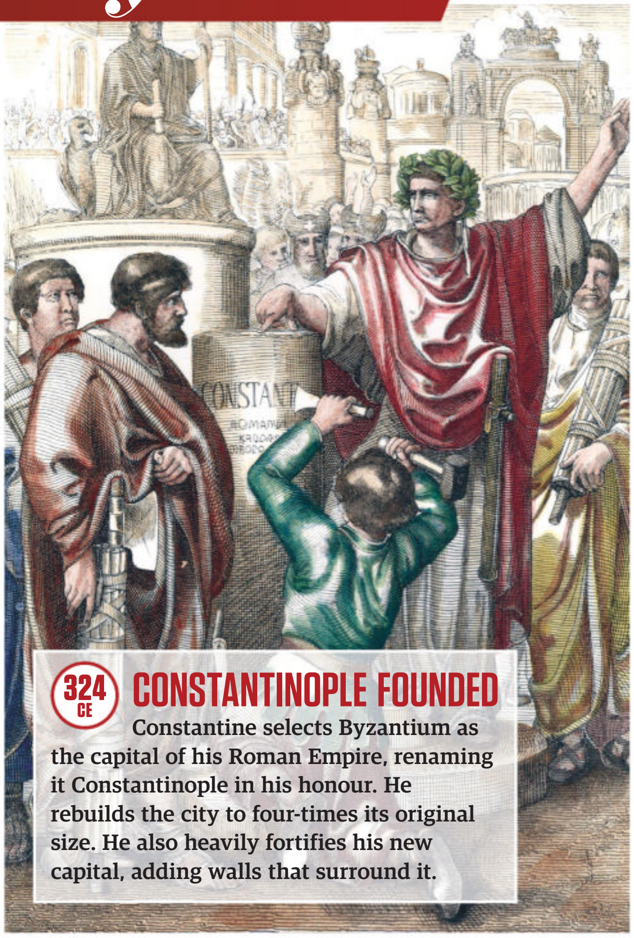
Main image: © Getty Images

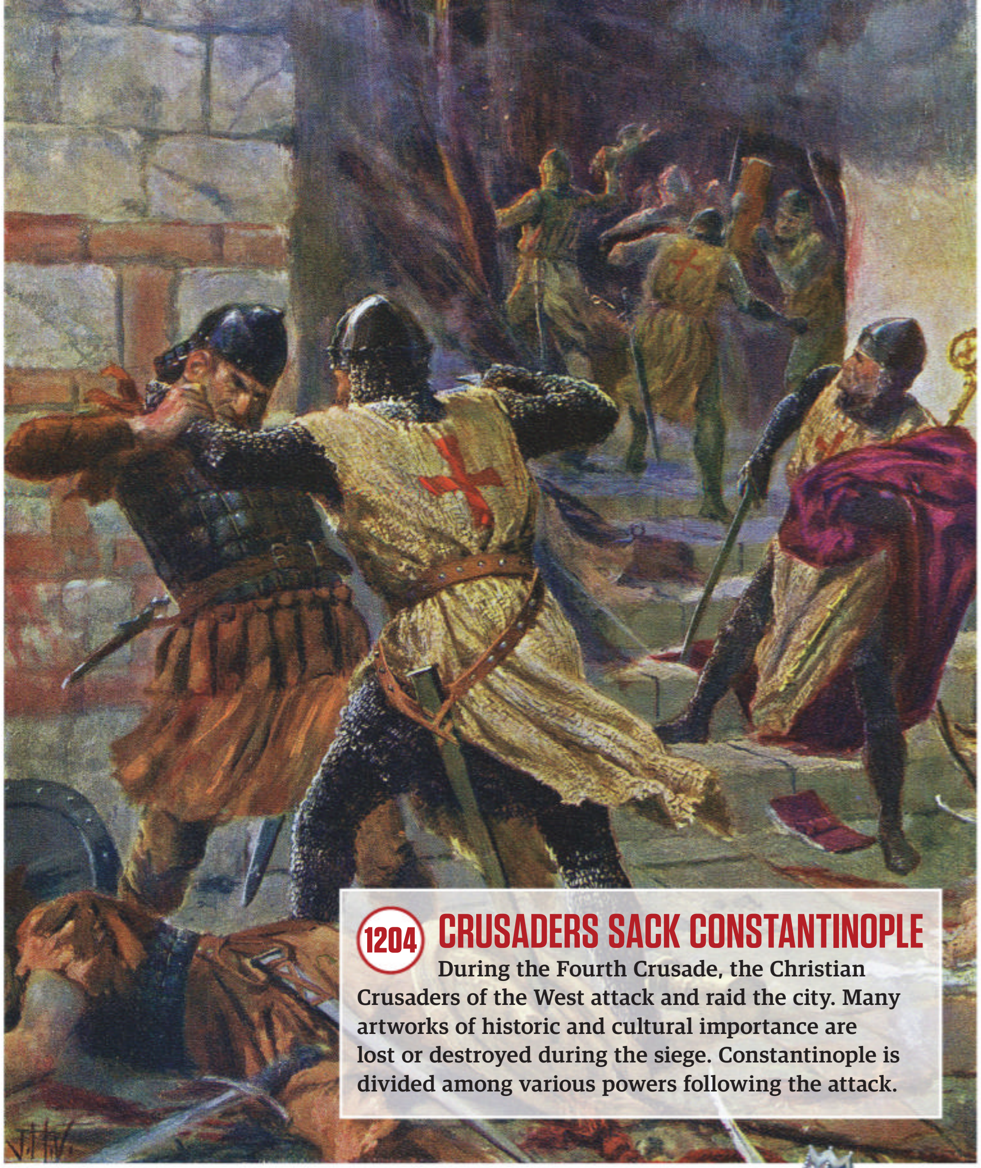
Written by Emily Staniforth, Callum McKelvie, Jonathan Gordon

Key Events



324 CE CONSTANTINOPLE FOUNDED

Constantine selects Byzantium as the capital of his Roman Empire, renaming it Constantinople in his honour. He rebuilds the city to four-times its original size. He also heavily fortifies his new capital, adding walls that surround it.



1204 CRUSADERS SACK CONSTANTINOPLE

During the Fourth Crusade, the Christian Crusaders of the West attack and raid the city. Many artworks of historic and cultural importance are lost or destroyed during the siege. Constantinople is divided among various powers following the attack.

HAGIA SOPHIA BUILT
537 CE

Justinian commissions the Hagia Sophia. Following the Fall of Constantinople it is later transformed into a mosque.

RESTORATION OF THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE 1261

After 57 years of foreign occupation, Constantinople is recaptured by the Empire of Nicea and Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos is crowned.

SULTANATE OF WOMEN
1566

During the reign of Suleiman the Great, a period begins in which women have increasing roles within the running of the Ottoman Court.

c.600 BCE

324 CE

1204

1348

1453

1459

THE JUSTINIAN PLAGUE 541 CE

Plague, thought to have begun with rats on grain ships, devastates Constantinople before spreading throughout the Mediterranean.

GRAND BAZAAR BUILT
1455

After his capture of Constantinople, Sultan Mehmed II orders the construction of the Grand Bazaar to facilitate trade.

COSSACK RAIDS BEGIN
1616

The Zaporozhian Cossacks launch the first of a series of devastating raids on Constantinople, continuing in 1620 and 1624.

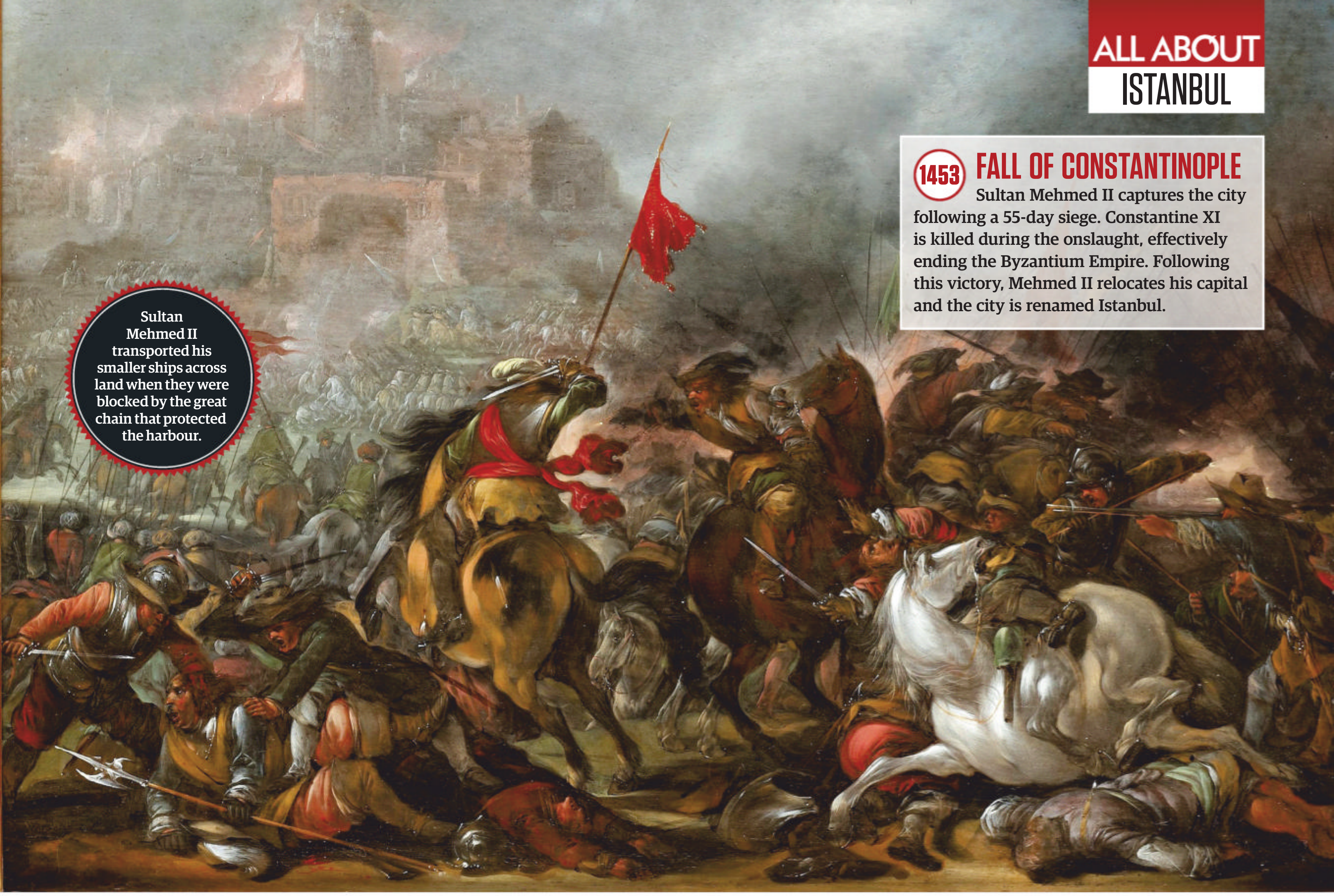
c.600 BCE BYZANTIUM FOUNDED

On the European side of the Strait of Bosphorus, Greek colonists found the city of Byzantium, named after their leader, Byzas, the son of King Nisos. Built within a secure inlet known as The Golden Horn, today it is Turkey's largest city, with a population of roughly 15 million.

The Golden Horn is considered to be the world's largest natural harbour.

1348 CONSTRUCTION OF THE GALATA TOWER

Emperor Justinian commissions the construction of the first Galata watchtower in about 507-508 CE. The tower is destroyed during the sack by the Crusaders in 1204. The current structure is built in 1348 and used both as a prison and to watch for fires.



1453 FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Sultan Mehmed II captures the city following a 55-day siege. Constantine XI is killed during the onslaught, effectively ending the Byzantium Empire. Following this victory, Mehmed II relocates his capital and the city is renamed Istanbul.

Sultan Mehmed II transported his smaller ships across land when they were blocked by the great chain that protected the harbour.

THE GREAT FIRE OF CONSTANTINOPLE 1660

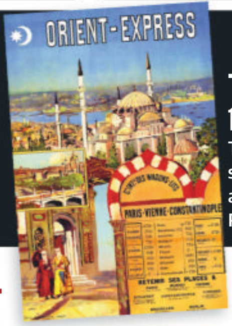
In the dry month of July, one-fifth of Constantinople is destroyed after a fire breaks out in the city.

EARTHQUAKE 1766

On 22 May a 7.1 magnitude earthquake hits Constantinople. The earthquake damages the Fatih Mosque, requiring its rebuilding in 1771.

THE TÜNEL 1875

The first underground railway system in Continental Europe, called The Tünel, opens. A funicular system built by French engineers, it operates to this day.



THE ORIENT EXPRESS 1889

The Orient Express, which launched six years earlier, begins its first route allowing direct rail travel between Paris and Constantinople.

OCCUPATION OF ISTANBUL 1918

Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, Istanbul is occupied by a multinational force.

1923

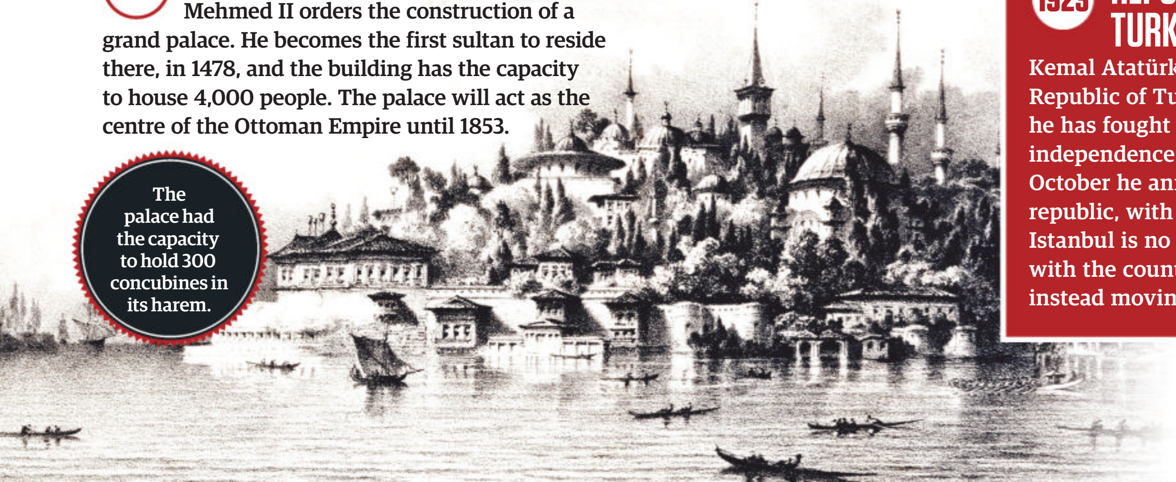
istanbul
2010
EUROPEAN
CAPITAL
OF CULTURE

ISTANBUL DECLARED EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2010

Istanbul is announced as a European Capital of Culture – one of three. Throughout the year a programme of events celebrates the city's rich and diverse history.

1459 TOPKAPI PALACE BUILT

Mehmed II orders the construction of a grand palace. He becomes the first sultan to reside there, in 1478, and the building has the capacity to house 4,000 people. The palace will act as the centre of the Ottoman Empire until 1853.



The palace had the capacity to hold 300 concubines in its harem.

1923 REPUBLIC OF TURKEY FOUNDED

Kemal Atatürk founds the Republic of Turkey. Since 1919 he has fought for Turkish independence and on 29 October he announces the new republic, with him as president. Istanbul is no longer the capital, with the country's seat of power instead moving to Ankara.

All images: © Alamy; © Getty Images

THE BLUE MOSQUE

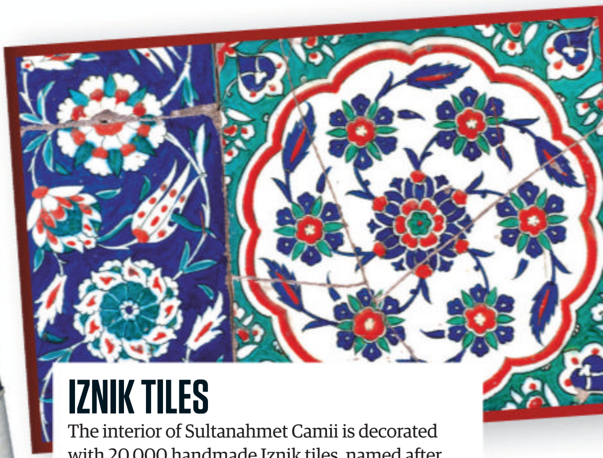
Istanbul, Turkey
1616 – Present

One of the most striking regions of modern Istanbul is the Sultanahmet district, home to several of the city's historic landmarks. Here you will find the Topkapi Palace, the site of the Hippodrome, the Hagia Sophia and what is known as The Blue Mosque. More properly named the Sultan Ahmed Mosque (Sultanahmet Camii), it was commissioned by the young emperor Sultan Ahmed I and constructed under architect Mehmed Ağa between 1609 and 1616.

Bringing together elements of Byzantine and Ottoman architecture and design, the mosque was both a hugely symbolic and somewhat controversial project on a number of fronts. For a start, it was deliberately designed and located to rival the famous Hagia Sophia, the former cathedral that had been converted into a mosque. Second, it was customary for a sultan to fund a great work like this through successful conquests and spoils of war, but Ahmed I had achieved no such feats and used treasury funds instead. Third, it was built on the site of the Great Palace of Constantinople, which some objected to.

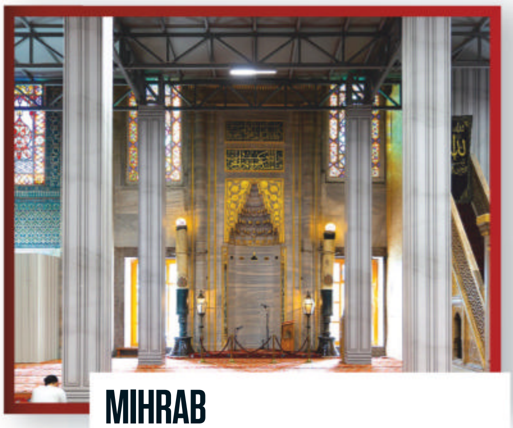
There was also concern over what was being built when six minarets were constructed around the mosque. At this time, the only mosque with that many was the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Masjid al-Haram. Being seen to compete or even outshine that site was incredibly divisive. Additional minarets were ultimately added to the Grand Mosque (which now has 13).

Whatever concerns or criticisms could be levelled at Mehmed Ağa's plans, the finished product was stunning. The mosque, which also featured a madrasah, a muvakkithane (for astronomers), hospital, imaret (soup kitchen), primary school, market and royal tomb, was made a World Heritage site in 1985. And Ahmed I was buried there, having died only a year after its construction was completed, aged 27.



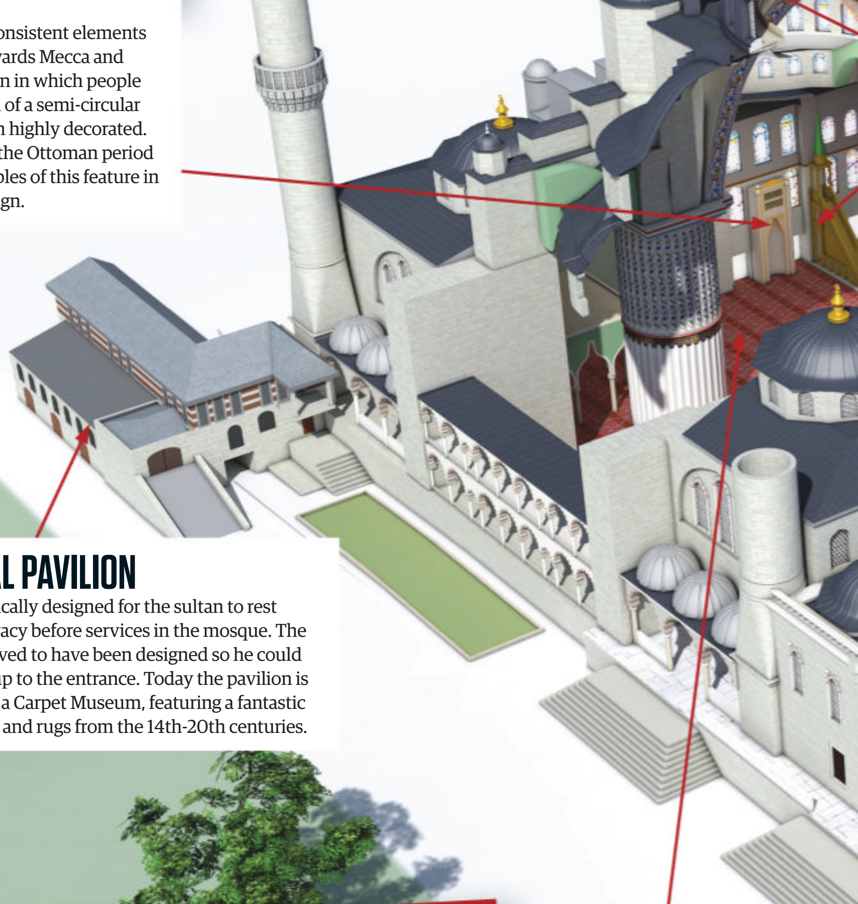
IZNIK TILES

The interior of Sultanahmet Camii is decorated with 20,000 handmade Iznik tiles, named after the region where they were made. The tiles are decorated with flowers such as tulips and roses, trees, fruits and other imagery. Most of these patterns are rendered in blue, turquoise and green, giving the interior of the mosque the blue hue from which it gets its common name.



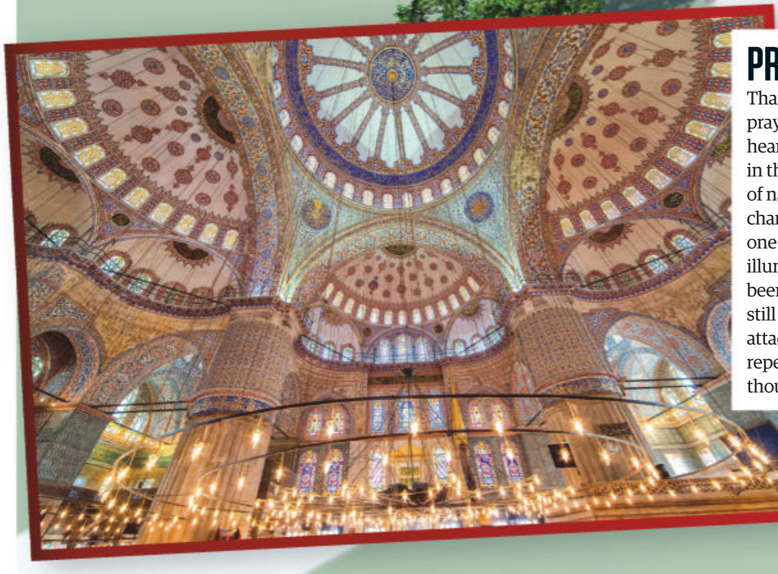
MIHRAB

The mihrab is one of three consistent elements of any mosque, pointing towards Mecca and as such pointing the direction in which people would pray. It takes the form of a semi-circular indentation in the wall, often highly decorated. A number of mosques from the Ottoman period offer some of the best examples of this feature in terms of decoration and design.



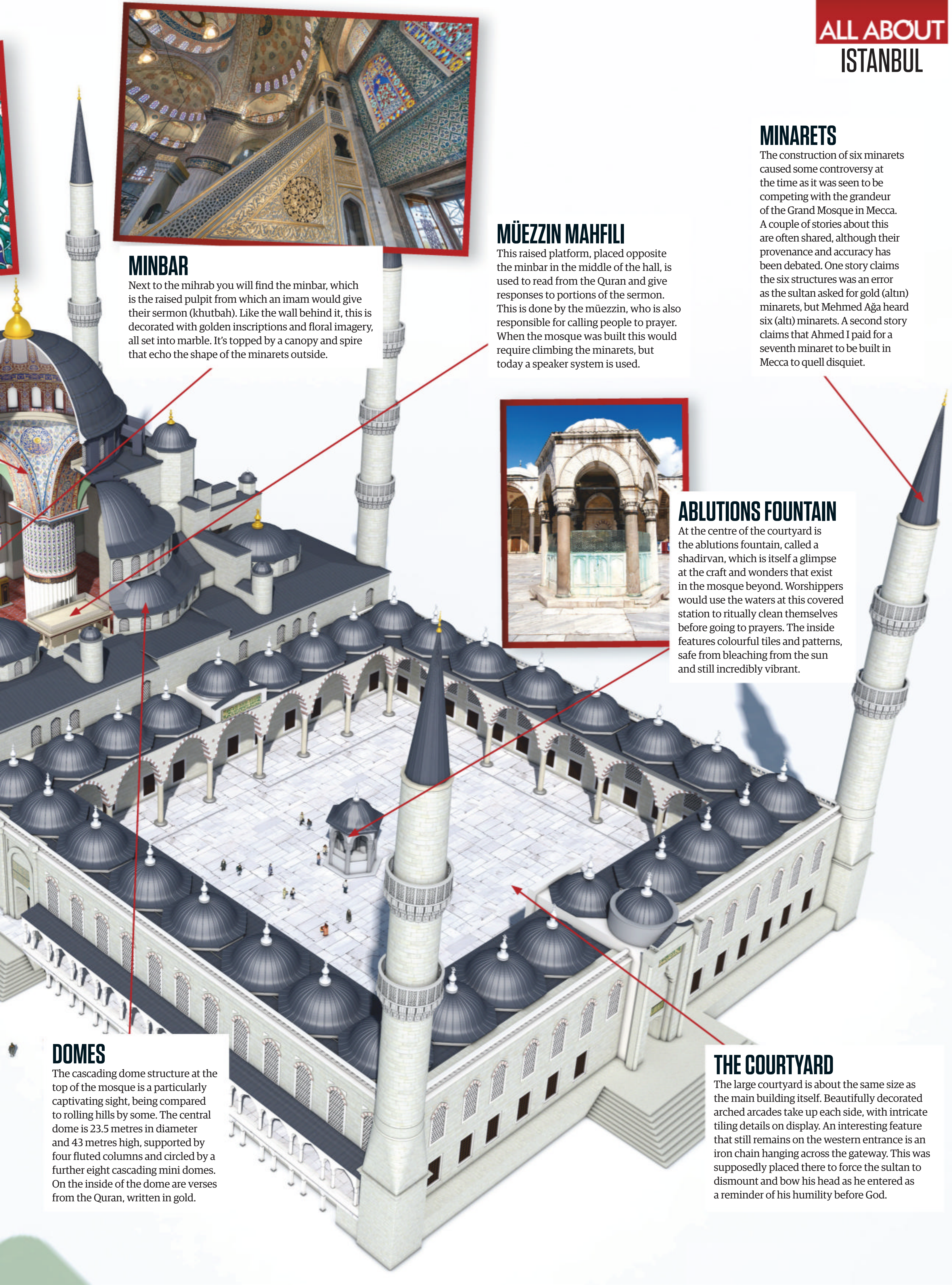
THE IMPERIAL PAVILION

This area was specifically designed for the sultan to rest and enjoy some privacy before services in the mosque. The sloped entry is believed to have been designed so he could ride his horse right up to the entrance. Today the pavilion is used as the home of a Carpet Museum, featuring a fantastic collection of carpets and rugs from the 14th-20th centuries.



PRAYER HALL

Thanks to the domes above, the prayer hall is a vast space at the heart of the mosque. Stained glass in the windows lets in plenty of natural light, and a series of chandeliers (including one large one in the middle) add to the illumination. These would have been oil lamps, and at least one still appears to have ostrich eggs attached to it as a natural spider repellent. (The eggs' smell is thought to ward off spiders.)



MINBAR

Next to the mihrab you will find the minbar, which is the raised pulpit from which an imam would give their sermon (khutbah). Like the wall behind it, this is decorated with golden inscriptions and floral imagery, all set into marble. It's topped by a canopy and spire that echo the shape of the minarets outside.

MÜEZZIN MAHFILI

This raised platform, placed opposite the minbar in the middle of the hall, is used to read from the Quran and give responses to portions of the sermon. This is done by the müezzin, who is also responsible for calling people to prayer. When the mosque was built this would require climbing the minarets, but today a speaker system is used.

MINARETS

The construction of six minarets caused some controversy at the time as it was seen to be competing with the grandeur of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. A couple of stories about this are often shared, although their provenance and accuracy has been debated. One story claims the six structures was an error as the sultan asked for gold (altın) minarets, but Mehmed Ağa heard six (altı) minarets. A second story claims that Ahmed I paid for a seventh minaret to be built in Mecca to quell disquiet.

ABLUTIONS FOUNTAIN

At the centre of the courtyard is the ablutions fountain, called a shadirvan, which is itself a glimpse at the craft and wonders that exist in the mosque beyond. Worshippers would use the waters at this covered station to ritually clean themselves before going to prayers. The inside features colourful tiles and patterns, safe from bleaching from the sun and still incredibly vibrant.

DOMES

The cascading dome structure at the top of the mosque is a particularly captivating sight, being compared to rolling hills by some. The central dome is 23.5 metres in diameter and 43 metres high, supported by four fluted columns and circled by a further eight cascading mini domes. On the inside of the dome are verses from the Quran, written in gold.

THE COURTYARD

The large courtyard is about the same size as the main building itself. Beautifully decorated arched arcades take up each side, with intricate tiling details on display. An interesting feature that still remains on the western entrance is an iron chain hanging across the gateway. This was supposedly placed there to force the sultan to dismount and bow his head as he entered as a reminder of his humility before God.

Illustration by: Adrian Mann
Insets: © Getty Images

BYZANTINE LADY IN WAITING

Constantinople 6th century

JEWELLERY

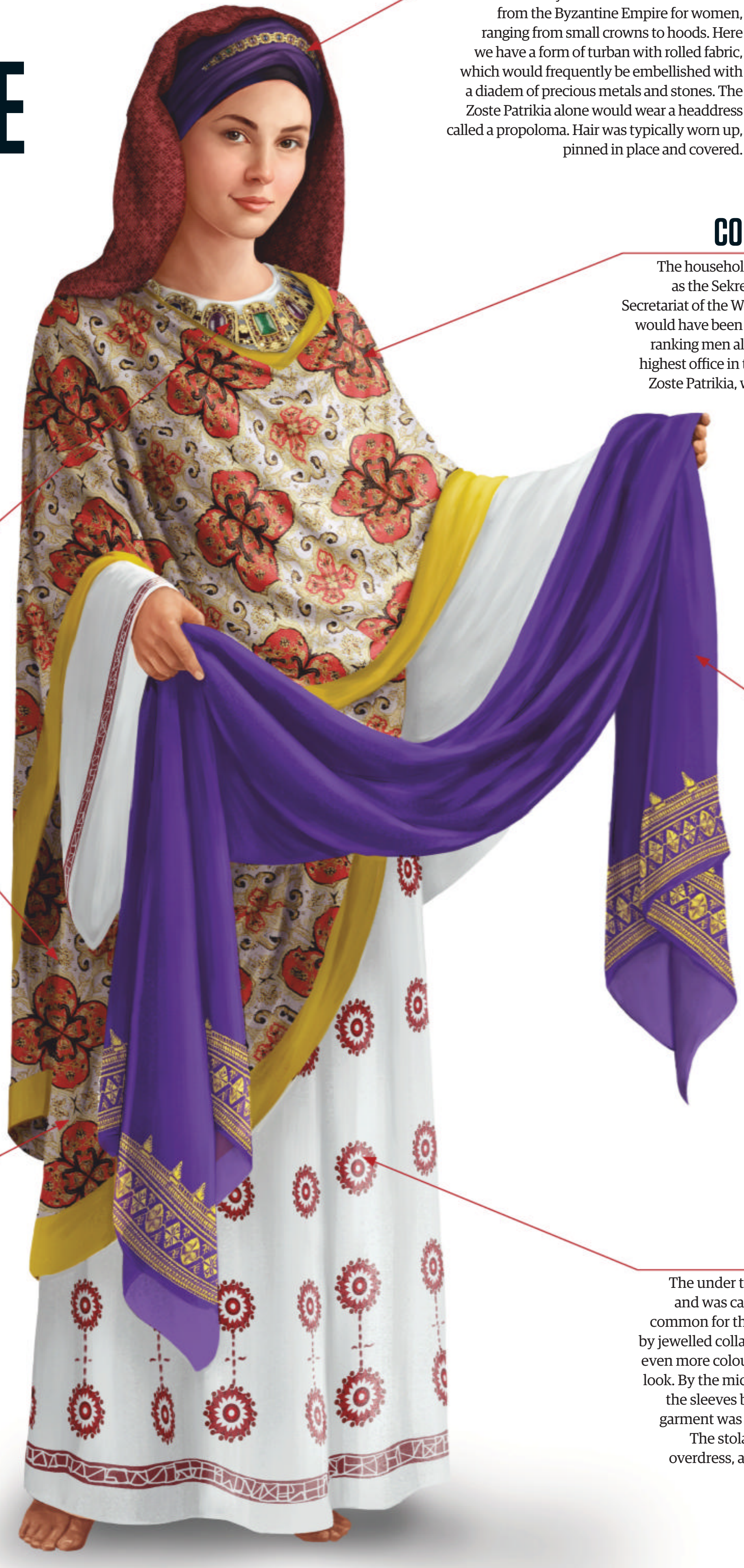
Jewellery appears to have been an important way to embellish clothing as well as a symbol of status. Lots of examples of Byzantine jewellery have survived showing a liberal use of gemstones set in gold for diadems, rings, earrings, bracelets, belts and much more.

COLOURFUL FABRICS

Byzantine fashion is often described as being quite conservative, but that tends to mean it covered a lot of the body rather than being muted. In fact, bold colours and bleached clothing were very expensive and a sign of great status. As such, the ladies of the court would have worn lots of bright colours, but not purple, as it was the royal colour.

INFLUENCES

As the Eastern Roman Empire, the clothing of early Byzantine life still retained a lot of influences from the ancient Roman era. Long tunics and togas continued to be prevalent even if the fabrics and designs became more elaborate and varied thanks to influences from further east.



HEADDRESS

There are many different forms of headdress from the Byzantine Empire for women, ranging from small crowns to hoods. Here we have a form of turban with rolled fabric, which would frequently be embellished with a diadem of precious metals and stones. The Zoste Patrikia alone would wear a headdress called a propoloma. Hair was typically worn up, pinned in place and covered.

COURT ATTENDANTS

The household of the empress was known as the Sekreton Tōn Gynaikōn, meaning Secretariat of the Women. Most of these women would have been the wives of noble and high-ranking men also attached to the court. The highest office in the empress' retinue was the Zoste Patrikia, who acted as chief attendant.

CLOTHING THE EMPRESS

Like ladies in waiting in later periods, those attending to the empress would be expected to help her dress. Sumptuary laws provided strict rules about what could and could not be worn by those beneath the emperor and empress. For instance, purple was reserved for the heads of state, while silk generally was an exclusively aristocratic material. As these fabrics became more affordable some of these rules did relax.

LONG TUNIC

The under tunic was often belted and was called a dalmatic. It was common for this to be accompanied by jewelled collars and girdles, adding even more colour and vibrancy to the look. By the middle Byzantine period the sleeves became larger and the garment was called the divetesion. The stola, a flowing sleeveless overdress, also became common.

Illustration: Kevin McGivern

Historical Treasures

MEDUSA HEADS

In the Basilica Cistern deep beneath the streets of Istanbul lie mysterious statues of the monstrous gorgon

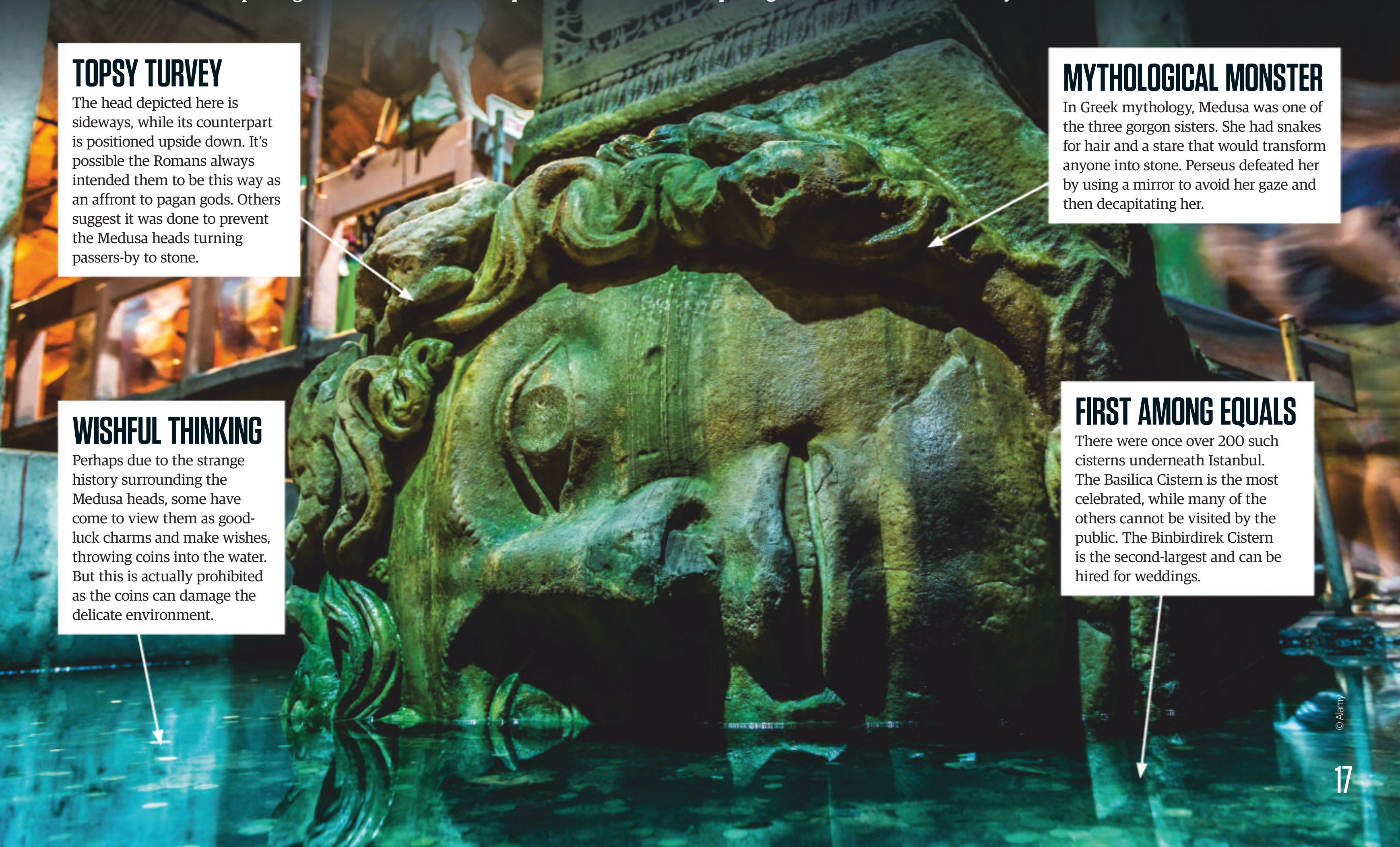
Istanbul, c.532 CE

Among the legacies of Emperor Justinian I, who ruled the Byzantine Empire from 527 to 565, are his colossal building projects such as the Hagia Sophia. However, for centuries one of the most impressive of his structures lay hidden from view and forgotten. The Basilica Cistern, constructed in 532, was designed to provide water to Justinian's palace in Constantinople and was able to hold 80,000 cubic metres of water. In 1545, the cistern was rediscovered by Frenchman Peter Gyllius after he heard bizarre tales of locals being able to catch fish from holes in their basements.

There are many mysteries within this underground labyrinth, but one of the most confounding is the origins of the two stone heads depicting the monstrous snake-headed Medusa of Greek mythology. Some historians theorise that they may have been removed from the Forum at Constantine in modern-day Algeria, where a third head was discovered. However, there are other theories. The authorities at the Basilica Cistern themselves suggest that it's possible they were built specifically for that structure to ward off evil spirits.

But this may not be the only link between the mythological gorgon and the subterranean labyrinth. According to one apocryphal story, sometime during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876 - 1909) he ordered that a sarcophagus be retrieved from the Basilica Cistern. Rumours of its existence had persisted since 1456 when a delegation from Venice had arrived and requested assistance in acquiring it, to no avail. It was said that when the sarcophagus was uncovered, what was found within was not a human cadaver but the mummified remains of a snake-like creature.

Between 1985 and 1987 major work was undertaken at the Basilica Cistern, and it was at this point that the Medusa heads were first uncovered. Since their rediscovery, Medusa has become inexorably linked with the mysterious subterranean structure. When contemporary sculptures were added to the shallow waters, it was little wonder that a terrifying figure of the snake-headed gorgon was one of the subjects chosen. Today, around two million people flock to the Basilica Cistern each year, and these mysterious artefacts remain popular with visitors brave enough to stare into their eyes.



TOPSY TURVEY

The head depicted here is sideways, while its counterpart is positioned upside down. It's possible the Romans always intended them to be this way as an affront to pagan gods. Others suggest it was done to prevent the Medusa heads turning passers-by to stone.

MYTHOLOGICAL MONSTER

In Greek mythology, Medusa was one of the three gorgon sisters. She had snakes for hair and a stare that would transform anyone into stone. Perseus defeated her by using a mirror to avoid her gaze and then decapitating her.

WISHFUL THINKING

Perhaps due to the strange history surrounding the Medusa heads, some have come to view them as good-luck charms and make wishes, throwing coins into the water. But this is actually prohibited as the coins can damage the delicate environment.

FIRST AMONG EQUALS

There were once over 200 such cisterns underneath Istanbul. The Basilica Cistern is the most celebrated, while many of the others cannot be visited by the public. The Binbirdirek Cistern is the second-largest and can be hired for weddings.

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ARTISTS, ARCHITECTS AND AUTHORS

Ten creative thinkers who across the centuries helped shape Istanbul into the city it is today

Aliye Berger

Turkish

24 Dec 1903 – 9 Aug 1973

Considered to be the first female Turkish engraver, Berger only took up the form in 1947 following the death of her lover of 23 years - but her husband of only six months - Karl Berger. Living in London at the time, it was her sister who encouraged her to explore new artistic avenues, including sculpture and, most importantly, engraving. In 1951 she returned to her native Turkey, where she held her first exhibition. In 1954 she entered the Labour and Production painting competition and won the coveted prize, angering her rivals and critics. Nonetheless, Berger's star continued to rise and in the years following her death she remains one of Istanbul's most celebrated artists.

Upon discovering that her lover Karl was having affairs, Aliye Berger shot at a woman who opened his door to her.

PRINCESS FAHRELNISSA ZEID

TURKISH, 6 DEC 1901 – 5 SEP 1991

The daughter of a high-ranking family in the Ottoman Empire, Zeid was among the first women to be schooled at the Academy of Fine Arts for Women in Istanbul. However, Zeid failed to graduate and would later study in Paris. In 1934 she married Prince Zeid bin Hussein of Iraq, becoming the Princess Zeid. She was best known for her large abstract paintings, and in 2017, her work *Towards A Sky* sold for just under one million dollars.

Osman Hamdi Bey

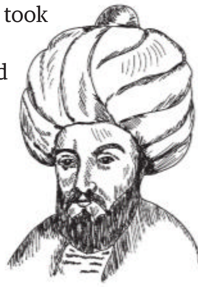
Turkish, 30 Dec 1842 – 24 Feb 1910

The son of the Grand Vizier, Osman Hamdi Bey had an excellent education in Istanbul. His paintings are admired for the evocative way they capture the lives of ordinary Istanbul citizens, which can be seen in works such as *Turtle Trainer* and *Women in the Yard of Şehzadebaşı Mosque*. Alongside his paintings, Hamdi Bey was also a statesman and archeologist. Combining these two interests, he helped ensure that any ancient artefacts uncovered within the realms of the Ottoman Empire would not be smuggled abroad. He also secured the Alexander Sarcophagus for the Istanbul Archaeology Museum.

HEZARFEN AHMED CELEBI

OTTOMAN, 1609-40

Hezarfen Ahmed Celebi was one of the great thinkers of his time and was a scientist, inventor, poet and musician. Celebi is best remembered today for a story that claims he was the first man to fly. Building wings, he took off from the top of the Galta Tower and managed a sustained 'flight' to Uskudar. While Sultan Murad IV rewarded his innovation with gold, he also condemned Celebi to exile in Algeria.



YAHYA KEMAL BEYATLI

TURKISH, 2ND DEC 1884 – 1ST NOV 1958

Considered one of Turkey's greatest literary voices, Beyatli's deep connection to his culture was reflected in his poetry. He was educated in Istanbul and taught at the university later in life, and a brief sojourn in Paris as a young man had a profound impact on his work as a writer. He also had a successful political career, working as ambassador to Spain, Poland and Pakistan.

HALIDE EDIB ADVAR

TURKISH, 11 JUNE 1884 – 9 JANUARY 1964

As well as a novelist of some repute, Halide Edib Advar was one of the key figures in the Turkish women's rights movement and served in the Turkish War of Independence (1919-23). Her novels often dealt with issues faced by Turkish women, and she later taught at Istanbul University. During the First World War she was the inspector of schools in Beirut, during which time the forced assimilation of orphaned children following the Armenian Genocide took place.

VEDAT TEK

TURKISH, 1873 – 1942

Vedat Tek was the last court architect of the Ottoman Empire. Following its dissolution, he continued to work for the Republic of Turkey and constructed the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in Ankara. He ceased working for the government when the Ankara palace was taken out of his hands. Without doubt his most celebrated contribution to Istanbul architecture is The Grand Post Office. Other notable projects include the Moda Pier, in the area of Istanbul of the same name.

VEDAT TEK
(1873-1942)
TÜRKİYE CUMHURİYETİ
500.000
POSTA / LİRA

Bruno Taut

German, 4 May 1880 - 24 Dec 1938

Bruno Taut was one of the most celebrated architects of the Weimar Republic, but his socialist views quickly made him an enemy of the rising Nazi Party. In 1933 he fled Nazi Germany, first to Japan and then to Istanbul in 1936, where he remained in exile. He busied himself by teaching and working on various architectural projects, including the design of Ankara University. Perhaps realising that he would never again see his homeland, he designed and built a house for himself in Ortakoy, which was completed in 1938.

Shortly after completing his Turkish home, and only two years after moving to Istanbul, Taut passed away on Christmas Eve 1938.

MIMAR SINAN

OTTOMAN, 1489 – 17 JULY 1588

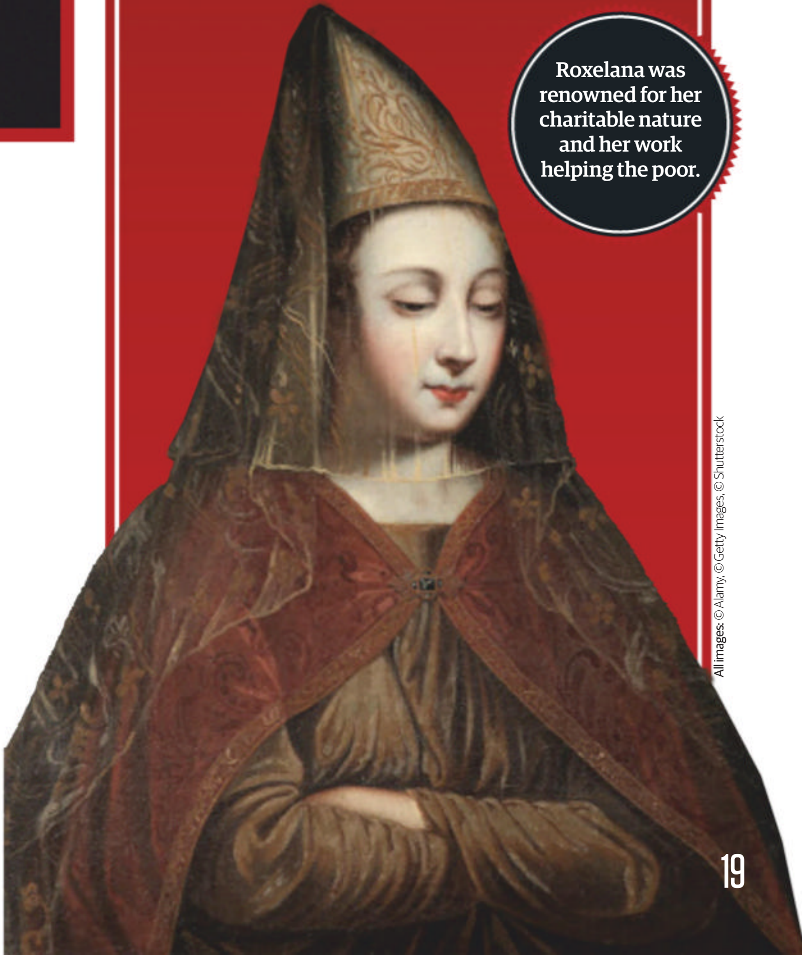
By far the most famous of all Ottoman architects, Sinan worked for three sultans: Suleiman the Magnificent, Selim II and Murad III. Raised as a Greek Christian, he converted to Islam and joined the Ottoman army. It was here that he began to work in construction, gradually becoming highly regarded until he was named as chief architect to the sultan. Among his achievements were the construction of 35 palaces and 84 large mosques (not to mention 51 smaller ones). His most famous work is the Suleymaniye Mosque, which can still be seen to this day. He died at the ripe old age of 99.

Hürrem Sultan

Ukrainian

c.1505 – 15 April 1558

Hürrem Sultan, also known as Roxelana, was likely born in what is now Ukraine. She was captured and sold into slavery, eventually becoming the chief consort to Suleiman the Magnificent. In such a lofty position she was able to commission a number of architectural projects, which she delegated to Mimar Sinan, the chief architect. Today the Istanbul skyline features a number of architectural wonders commissioned by Roxelana. Chief among these is the Hurrem Sultan Hammam, a traditional Turkish bathhouse, and the Haseki Sultan Complex. The latter contained a mosque, soup kitchen, school and a hospital.



Roxelana was renowned for her charitable nature and her work helping the poor.

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VISITING OTTOMAN ISTANBUL

Charles FitzRoy immerses us in the experiences of people who travelled to the city in the 18th century

What drew so many 18th century travellers from far and wide to the city of Istanbul?

They were drawn to Istanbul (which most referred to by its old name of Constantinople) because of its reputation as a place of outstanding beauty and exotic fascination. The inhabitants of this magnificent city were an astonishingly cosmopolitan group, coming from every corner of the vast Ottoman Empire and beyond. This was evident in the wide variety of picturesque clothes they wore. Every aspect of their lives was far removed from life in western Europe: the hustle of the bazaars, the way they prayed in the mosques, their love of coffee shops and opium dens, and the manner in which Turkish women wore veils covering their faces.

The popularity of the Grand Tour meant that western Europeans had acquired a taste for travel and were now prepared to venture further afield. The Ottoman Empire was no longer a no-go area and their imaginations were fired with tales of what went on behind the walls of the Topkapi Palace, where the sultan lived and enjoyed his famous harem.

What were some of the most popular destinations for travellers to visit during this era in Istanbul?

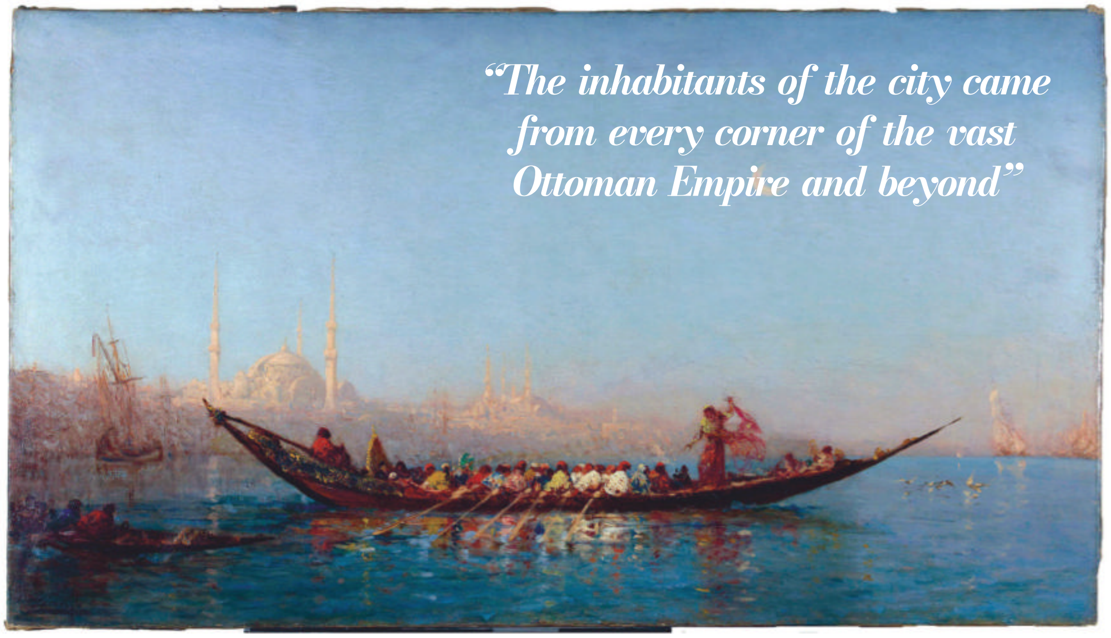
There was an enormous amount to see, ranging from world-famous mosques, the chaotic exuberance of the markets, the more tranquil atmosphere of the coffee shops, and the luxurious experience of sampling a Turkish bath. This was not always easy: non-Muslims were forbidden from entering a mosque, so Westerners could only visit in disguise, or enlist the help of a local. However, the astonishing beauty of the best of these, notably Ayasofya (formerly the great basilica of Hagia Sophia) and The Blue Mosque, covered in exquisite Iznik tiles, meant that many visitors were prepared to take the risk.

Other famous sites were the ancient Hippodrome, the scene of so many key events in Ottoman and Byzantine history; the Land Walls, which defended the city for 1,000 years; and the Galata Tower, the centre of the area where all foreigners resided. For those more adventurous visitors, the Grand Bazaar was an overwhelming experience, a place you could buy anything you desired. Even more thrilling was attending the Slave Market, sampling an opium den, or taking pleasure in a Turkish bath.

Charles FitzRoy is an art historian who runs Fine Art Travel Ltd. He is the author of several books, including *The Rape of Europa* (Bloomsbury, 2015) and *Renaissance Florence on Five Florins a Day* (Thames & Hudson, 2010).

Can you tell us what it was like inside the Topkapi Palace, the home of the sultans, in the 18th century?

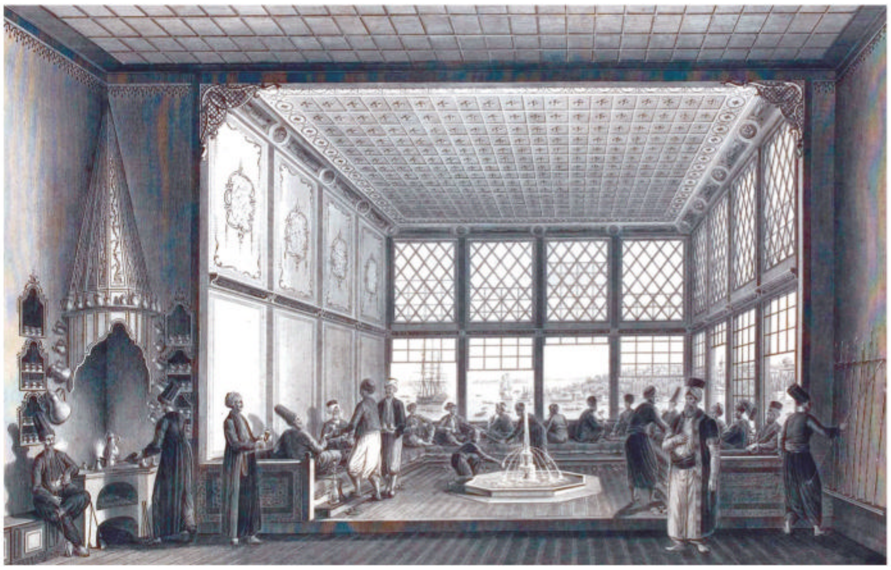
The fact that so few foreigners had ever entered the gates of the palace led to intense speculation. The palace had the atmosphere of complete silence and secrecy. This was enhanced by the sinister reputation of the janissaries, elite soldiers who guarded the sultan. The various inhabitants of the Topkapi were carefully segregated: court functionaries, including high-ranking eunuchs and the Grand Vizier, janissaries and an army of servants, many of them serving in the vast range of kitchens or the stables. Members



BELOW The sultan would be rowed across the Bosphorus in an elegant caique

> *"The inhabitants of the city came from every corner of the vast Ottoman Empire and beyond"*

Headshot: Charles FitzRoy



ABOVE A lavish hall in the harem of the Topkapi Palace

LEFT Coffee houses like the one depicted here were first established in Istanbul in the 16th century

of the sultan's own family were similarly segregated, some of them incarcerated in prison cells within the palace.

Speculation ran rife over the sultan's harem where the most beautiful women throughout the empire could be found, and who were guarded by eunuchs and mutes. Since there was no law of primogeniture in the Ottoman succession, every concubine had the possibility of mothering the next sultan and this led to intense rivalry and intrigue.

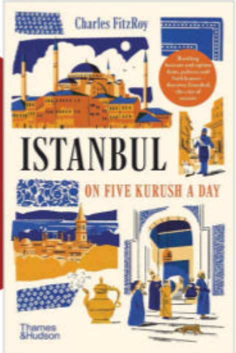
What sort of entertainment was on offer for people in Istanbul at this time?

Foreigners were fascinated to see the sultan when he emerged from Topkapi Palace. There were a number of opportunities to do this. The easiest place was at The Blue Mosque where the sultan rode to Friday prayers on a regular basis. Alternatively, the sultan might be spotted being rowed in his elegant boat (known as a caique) on the Bosphorus. Like the sultan, many visitors escaped the city in summer by taking boats up to Belgrade Village, a forest filled with magnificent trees. The pleasure gardens at the top of the Golden Horn were also very popular, the kiosks filled with musicians, acrobats and magicians, with countless theatrical displays and the night sky illuminated by fireworks. There were many festivals throughout the year, many of them religious – the ones celebrating the end of Ramadan (a month of fasting) being particularly exuberant. Other festivals were centred on the sultan's family: the accession of the sultan himself, the circumcision of his sons and the weddings of his daughters.

What would it have been like to visit Istanbul's bazaars in the 1700s?

A visit to one of the bazaars was an extraordinary experience for Westerners, their senses overwhelmed by the combination of colour, noise and smell. The most memorable was the Grand Bazaar, a vast Aladdin's Cave consisting of over 4,000 shops. The Spice Bazaar was very exotic, with its intoxicating aroma of coffee, incense, saffron and pepper. And the Slave Market provided a particular frisson for foreign visitors, as they witnessed the ruthless way that dealers bought and sold men and women from all parts of the Ottoman Empire, Circassian girls from the Black Sea being particularly highly prized.

ISTANBUL ON FIVE KURUSH A DAY
BY CHARLES FITZROY IS OUT NOW



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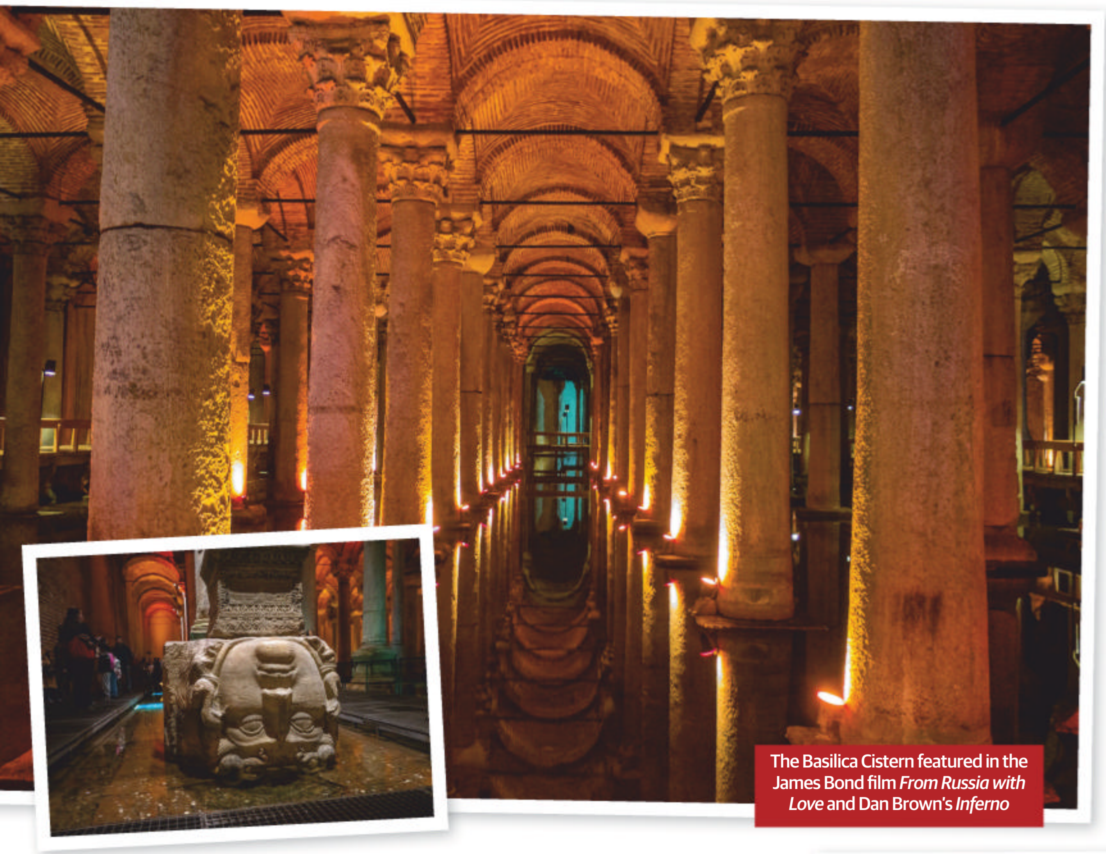
ISTANBUL'S HISTORIC MONUMENTS

Discover the sites that have stood the test of time during the ancient city's long, turbulent history



The Basilica Cistern featured in the James Bond film *From Russia with Love* and Dan Brown's *Inferno*

1 BASILICA CISTERN

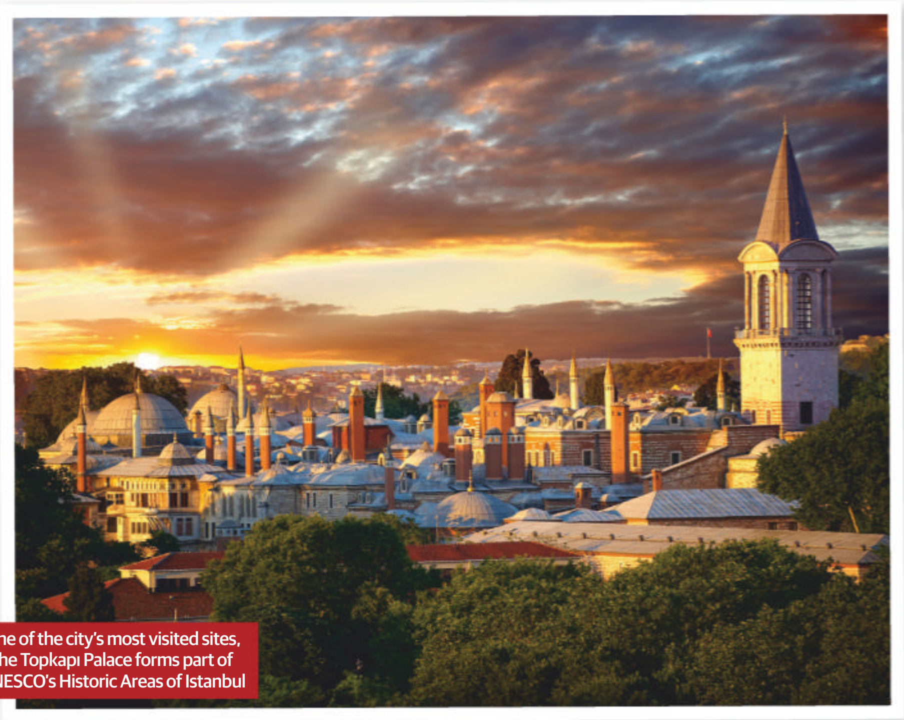
ALEMDAR, YEREBATAN CD 1/3, 34110 FATIH

Located below the streets of Istanbul is an ancient water storage facility that was first built in the 6th century. Constructed during the reign of Byzantine Roman Emperor Justinian I in 532 CE, the expansive cistern is called the Basilica Cistern because it was originally built underneath the Stoa Basilica, a large public square. The initial purpose of the cistern was to supply water to Constantinople's Great Palace and possibly its surrounding areas too, though now it's purely a historic monument rather than a functioning water source. Visitors can explore the subterranean labyrinth, which is sometimes referred to as the Sunken Palace due to its magnificent architecture, using the wooden walkways that were added during restoration work in the 1980s. The underground structure is held up by a total of 336 marble columns, two of which have mysterious Roman-era sculptures of the head of Medusa at their base that are believed to have been repurposed from another Roman building (see page 17).

2 TOPKAPI PALACE

CANKURTARAN MAH. BABI HÜMAYUN CAD
NO: 1 SULTANAHMET/FATIH

From the 1460s, the Topkapı Palace was one of the most significant buildings of the Ottoman Empire as the residence and administrative centre of the sultans. Built by Sultan Mehmed II, the palace was expanded and reconfigured during the 400 years it served as the primary seat of the sultans, with around 30 Ottoman rulers living there until the Dolmabahçe Palace was constructed in 1856. Thanks to its lengthy history and numerous renovations, the Topkapı Palace is now a beautiful combination of differing architectural styles. Spanning approximately 700,000 square-metres and surrounded by five kilometres of high walls, the vast palace is a treasure trove where visitors can immerse themselves in Istanbul's Ottoman history. Since 1924, the Topkapı Palace has functioned as a museum, allowing visitors to experience the grandeur of spaces such as the imperial harem, treasury, library and kitchens. Relics and artefacts, including significant religious relics like the Staff of Moses and Muhammad's sword, are also displayed at the palace.



One of the city's most visited sites, the Topkapı Palace forms part of UNESCO's Historic Areas of Istanbul

The Yedikule Fortress operated as a prison for much of its history

3 YEDIKULE FORTRESS

YEDIKULE MEYDANI SK. NO:9, 34107 FATIH

The Yedikule Fortress, also known as the Castle of the Seven Towers, is an imposing medieval structure built to encompass part of the 5th century Theodosian Walls that were constructed under the rule of Theodosius II. The walls included the Golden Gate, an ancient archway that acted as the entrance to the city of Constantinople and as a triumphal gateway for Byzantine emperors and their victorious military forces. Commissioned by Sultan Mehmed II after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the Yedikule Fortress was built to include the Golden Gate and was expanded into a formidable stronghold with additional adjoining walls and towers.

Throughout its Ottoman history, the fortress acted as an integral part of Constantinople's defences, a treasury and a prison. As a dungeon and jail, Yedikule was notorious as the site of incarceration for many high-profile prisoners, including Sultan Osman II, who was imprisoned and executed at the fortress in 1622. During the Napoleonic Wars (1803-15), prisoners were once again held within Yedikule's walls, and it was later used to house a small mosque and a school. Today, the fortress is open to the public as a site of historic interest and offers visitors the chance to explore the fortifications and take in the stunning views of Istanbul from the top of the walls.

4 COLUMN OF CONSTANTINE

MOLLA FENARI, VEZIRHAN CD. NO:16 D:18, 34120 FATIH

The ancient monument was erected in 330 CE

Standing at just under 35 metres tall, the Column of Constantine is an ancient monument from the Roman period of Istanbul when Emperor Constantine refounded the city of Byzantium as Constantinople, the new capital of the Roman Empire. Erected in 330 CE, the column was originally topped by a statue of Constantine dressed as the god Apollo and was built to commemorate the momentous occasion. The column, made from purple Egyptian porphyry rock, stood at the centre of the Forum of Constantine, a large public area that no longer exists but was once a central point of the city. In Turkish the column is known as Çemberlitaş, meaning 'hooped stone', due to the metal rings that were added to the structure in the 16th century to stabilise it. The Column of Constantine has survived fire and earthquakes and is notable today as the oldest and one of the only ancient reminders of Constantinople's founder still standing in Istanbul.

5 HAGIA SOPHIA

SULTAN AHMET, AYASOFYA MEYDANI NO:1, 34122 FATIH

One of Istanbul's most popular tourist destinations, the Hagia Sophia has existed in the city in one form or another since the 4th century. The iconic landmark was first built as Constantinople's main Christian cathedral during the rule of Emperor Constantius II, though this building was damaged by fire in 404 CE. A second church was built later in the 5th century, but this also burned down. The third Hagia Sophia church, built under the reign of Justinian I (482 – 565 CE), survived until the Ottomans conquered Constantinople in 1453, when the grand building was converted into a mosque by Sultan Mehmed II. Despite its conversion, the 1,000 year old architecture of the Hagia Sophia remained largely unchanged. However, several additions were made to suit its new purpose, including a minaret, a tower for the call to prayer and a mihrab – a niche in the wall of the mosque that indicates the direction of Mecca. Further architectural renovations have been made to the Hagia Sophia since the 15th century, though much of the building remains as it did when it was first built. A physical representation of Istanbul's religious history, the mosque has been admired for centuries for its Byzantine dome, Christian mosaics and Islamic features. After being turned into a museum in the 1930s, the Hagia Sophia was converted back into a mosque in 2020.

The Hagia Sophia remains open to the public despite still operating as a mosque

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THE FIRST *Chinese* EMPIRE

How the Qin forged a great power from the fragments of the Warring States

Written by Miguel Miranda

The pinnacle of ancient Chinese history began with a teenage prince ascending the throne with his mother's blessing. The landlocked kingdom of Qin (pronounced 'cheen') was at a crucial juncture now the youthful Ying Zheng, barely 13 years old, was at the helm of government. But for all intents and purposes the boy, for he was indisputably a child, was a stand-in for an ill-defined regency shared by his mother the queen and that cunning and misunderstood figure behind the throne – the minister Lu Buwei. These two people could not have been a greater contrast for the teenage king. Lu Buwei himself, for his airs of breeding and sophistication, was a professional administrator, the kind of which flourished in China's years of disorder among seven rival kingdoms. But Lu Buwei vanishes from the historical record once Ying Zheng reaches adulthood – as does the queen mother – and a new figure appears of gravely understated importance: the brilliant scribe and sophist, no less than a protege of Lu Buwei himself, the enigmatic Li Si.

> "IN 500 YEARS THE GREAT PHILOSOPHIES WERE BORN AND ENDURING LITERATURE WRITTEN"

Perhaps it is fitting to re-orient the saga of China's renowned uniter, the fearsome Qin Shi Huang that Ying Zheng would become, and focus instead on this shadowy adviser Li Si. The Qin court was a sophisticated one, adept at navigating the rivalries of the seven kingdoms during the Warring States era, where administration and long held practices enabled governance over large societies no matter who ruled as sovereign. Lack of national unity did not harm the flourishing of Chinese culture; in the 500 years without a unified empire the great philosophies were born and enduring literature written. Whether in politics or strategy, the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Era (770-221 BCE) left the world with classics such as the *Tao Te Ching* and Sun Tzu's ruminations on strategy.

As for Li Si, with little known about him, he was an intellectual who curried favour in

Illustration by: Dan Strange

Qin Dynasty TIMELINE

The rise and fall of the first empire

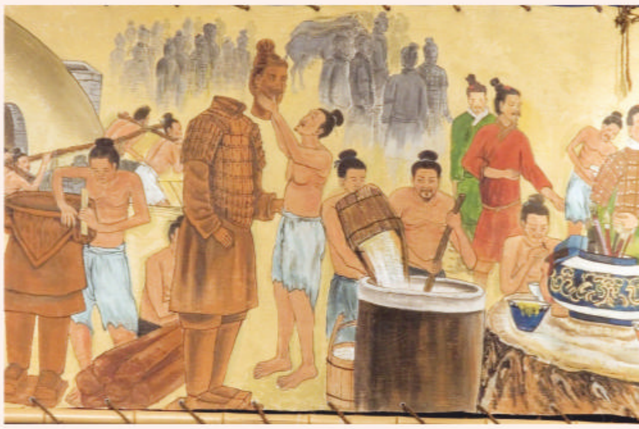
475 BCE
With support for the Zhou dynasty dwindling, a new period of their hegemony begins, known as the Warring States period.

328 BCE
Having been a loyal ally to the Zhou king, Qin is awarded with royal status, with Duke Huiwen becoming a king in his own right.

259 BCE
Ying Zheng, or Zhao Zheng, later known as Qin Shi Huang, is born to his father Zhuangxiang, who is being held hostage by the Zhao state at the time.

246 BCE
Prince Ying Zheng becomes Qin king at the age of 13 following the death of his father. Lu Buwei acts as his regent.

221 BCE
Ying Zheng leads the Qin to victory over the Yan and Qi. He takes the title Shi Huangdi, meaning 'first emperor'.



ABOVE The individual faces of the Qin soldiers cast in terracotta have intrigued historians for decades

TOP-RIGHT A depiction of the terracotta figures being made

the beleaguered Qin royal household. The Qin existed in the shadow of the once- dominant Zhou dynasty, who were weakened after several hundred years of wars against northern steppe nomads and rival kingdoms. The nomads, mischaracterised as barbarians, were the Xiongnu or Hsiung Nu pastoralists who traded with Chinese kingdoms for centuries but went to war if this lucrative exchange was interrupted. The pattern resulted in China's feudal society reorganising under kingship that relied on the armies led by minor aristocrats. Over time the earlier Zhou state of the 8th century BCE, like the Shang state before them, became worn down and almost bankrupt.

Like a Henry Kissinger of the ancient world, Li Si thrived next to a powerful figure who enacted crucial decisions. Taking after the Qin kingdom's reforms from the 4th century BCE that streamlined government paperwork and abolished feudalism to recruit more soldiers, Li Si wasted no time steering his prince and the kingdom into protracted war with the neighbouring Zhao. Over two decades his influence ushered in a new era. One after another the Zhao, the Yen and the Chu kingdoms fell to the Qin armies not because of brute conquest but via a masterful exercise in subterfuge and coup d'etats. By 221 BCE the inexperienced prince assumed the rank of emperor over the six enemy kingdoms: Qin Shi Huang arrived on the pages of history.

Reflecting the new empire's joint administration between Qin Shi Huang and his prime minister, the tireless Li Si, a series of reforms based on the Qin government model were enacted. In some aspects, the preoccupations of the former

220 BCE
Developing on fortifications from the Warring States period, construction of the Great Wall of China begins.

215 BCE
Qin Shi Huang commissions the construction of his tomb and an 8,000-strong terracotta army.

213 BCE
Facing criticism from Confucian scholars, Qin orders the burning of official histories and other texts to quell dissent.

212 BCE
Not content with the reaction to the book-burning, 460 scholars are reportedly buried alive to crush opposition.

210 BCE
Qin Shi Huang dies while touring his empire. Some sources claim he was poisoned by drinking an elixir that was supposed to extend his life.

207 BCE
Hu-Hai, son of the emperor, succeeds his father as Qin Er Shim, but he is overthrown three years later and the Qin dynasty collapses.

rival kingdoms were continued, such as years-long building projects. When historians cite the Qin empire's abolition of feudalism and the emperor's efforts at standardising written language, coinage and weights and measures, it helps to understand why these were done in the first place. When it came to writing, a uniform script suited the rectangular bamboo cards that were sown together into volumes - the books of the era. Since farmers were the bedrock of society and economy their produce had to reach markets and sell at the correct prices, so weights and scales were adjusted. The Qin obsession with economic growth required a system of national highways, the minting of coinage, the redesign of cattle carts, and further work on the canals reaching to southern China. As a finishing touch the Qin capital of Xianyang added newly built neighbourhoods for 120,000 affluent families. No aspect of public life escaped the gaze of the state.

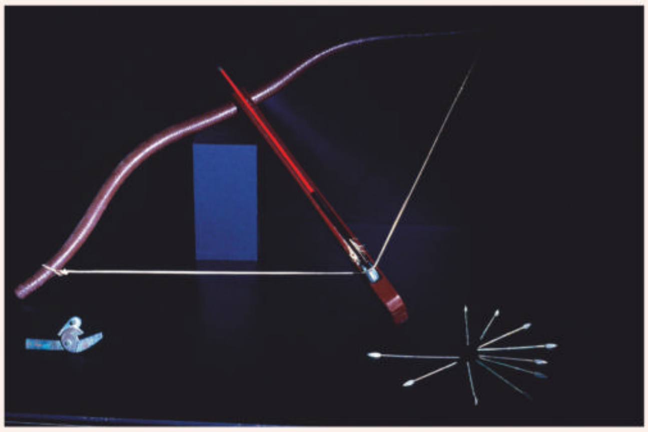
THE GRAND HISTORIAN

A single powerful emperor was an enduring character in the Chinese past. With 221 BCE as vantage point one could look back 2,000 years and glimpse mythical figures like the original Huang Di, or Yellow Emperor, who bestowed knowledge of farming and governance to the earliest tribes. By contrast, the Qin empire that dominated China in the late 3rd century was an undisputed superpower. From the capital Xianyang, the youthful emperor, having just reached his 38th year, had as many as a million soldiers at his disposal. Far more valuable than a mass army were the countless civil servants who fulfilled the day-to-day administration of this civilisational project. The scale of it was astounding. To win uncounted years of peace, workers were assigned to the arid north, the former Zhou kingdom's fringe, for constructing the interlinked ramparts and towers considered a 'great wall.' Outside the imperial capital, at a site near Li Shan mountain, thousands were toiling over the emperor's mausoleum. It was such a strange endeavour to be laying down the ornate burial site for a reign that had just begun.

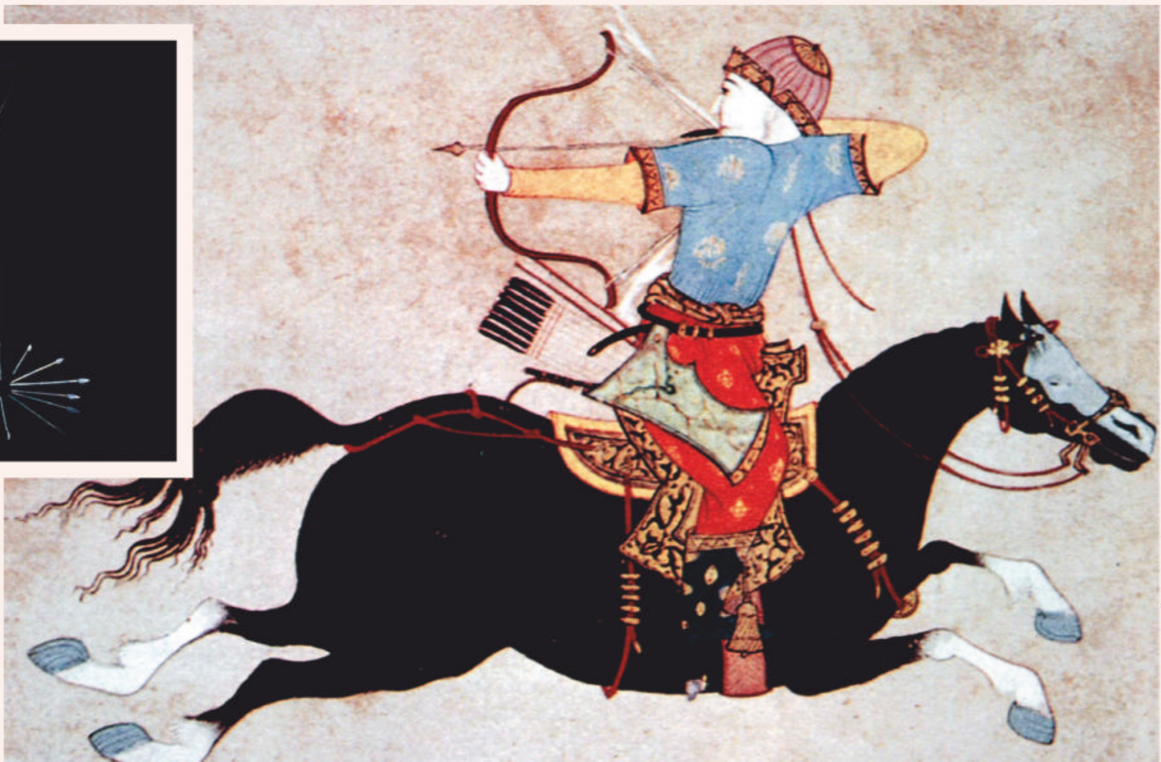
> "LIKE A HENRY KISSINGER OF THE ANCIENT WORLD, LI SI THRIVED NEXT TO A POWERFUL FIGURE WHO ENACTED CRUCIAL DECISIONS"

These insights form a small portrait of a man and his time written long after his death. For 2,000 years the common knowledge of Qin Shi Huang's life and reign were encapsulated in acerbic paragraphs from an old text. The historian Sima Qian, himself born a quarter century after the Qin empire fell apart, was an exalted member of the Han dynasty's officialdom. His own father held the important rank of court historian, but the role was closer to a chief astrologer or diviner. It was only later in life when Sima Qian, having been ostracised and redeemed after a political scandal, set about to finish the *Records of the Grand Historian*, or *Shiji*. The end result was a definitive national epic recounting the course of Chinese civilisation; at least until the author's lifetime.

However, there are shortcomings in the Grand Historian's narrative. It is from this very text, with its convenient biographies

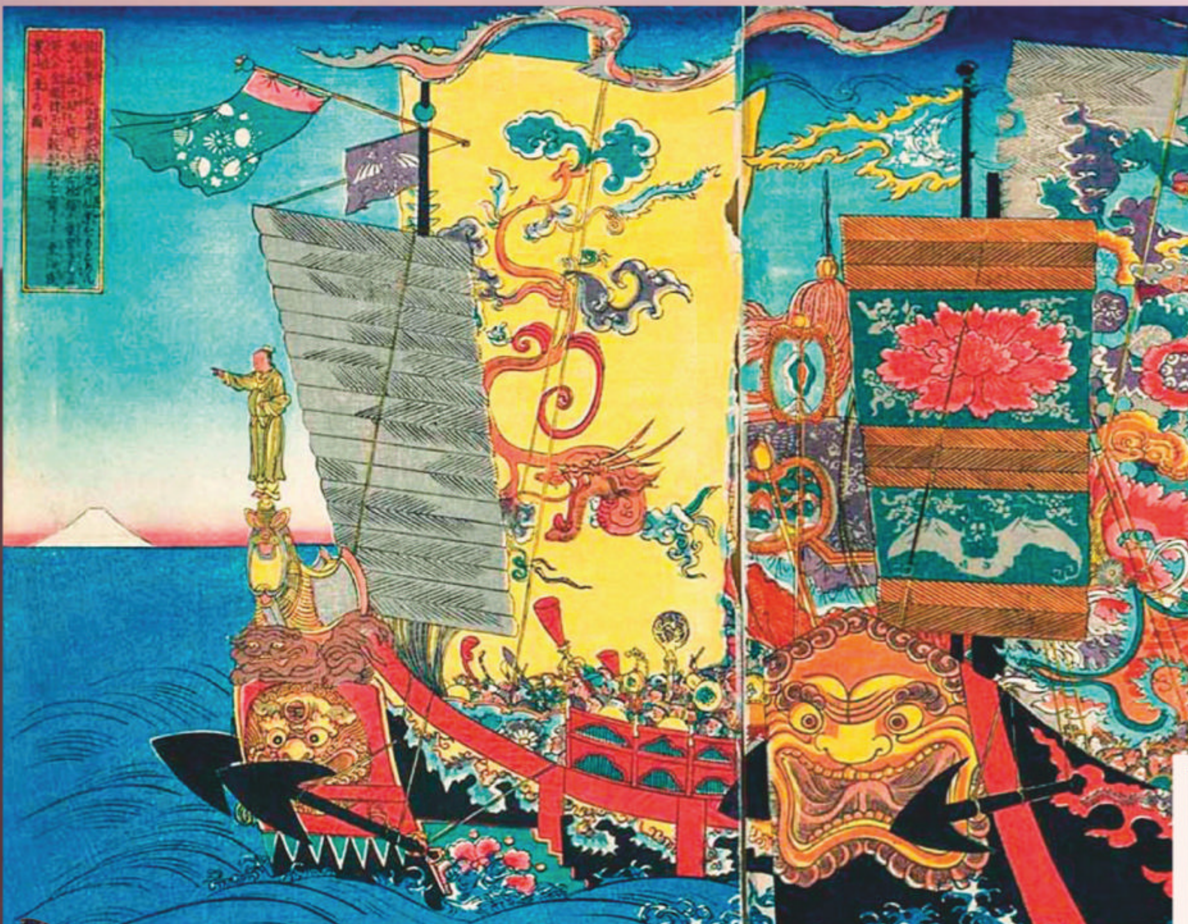


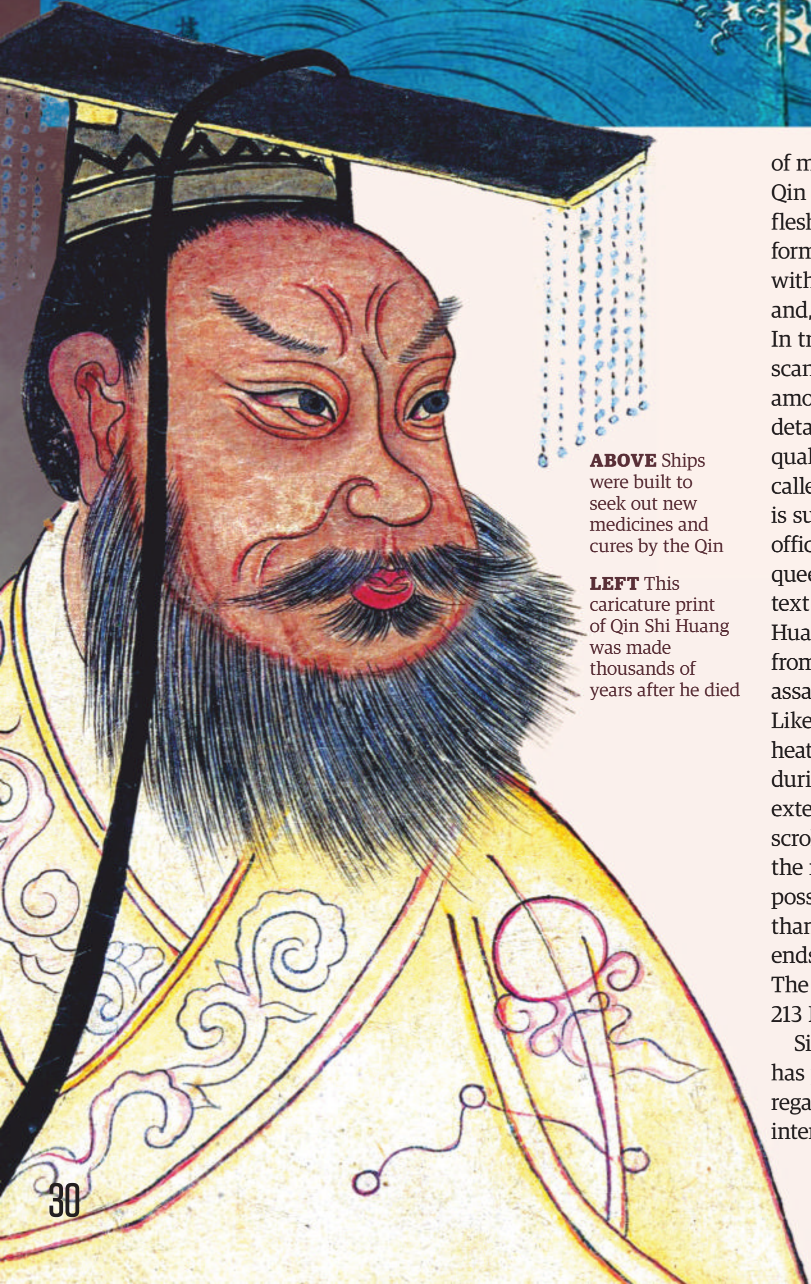
ABOVE The crossbow was shaped like the composite bows used by the Hsiung Nu horsemen



RIGHT This Turkish archer on horseback represents China's historical nemesis: the nomadic warriors who roved the Eurasian steppe

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images





ABOVE Ships were built to seek out new medicines and cures by the Qin

LEFT This caricature print of Qin Shi Huang was made thousands of years after he died

of many emperors and their reigns, that Qin Shi Huang as merciless tyrant is fleshed out in cartoonish proportions. The former prince of Qin is given short shrift, with Sima Qian pointing out his large nose and, to the reader's surprise, evil character. In translation this reads as "a man of scant mercy who has a heart of a wolf," among other unflattering barbs. Further details on the emperor's lineage have the quality of tabloid fodder, with his heritage called into question when his father is suggested to be the scheming court official Lu Buwei, whose liaison with the queen sired a bastard prince. It is in the text of the *Grand Historian* where Qin Shi Huang's greatest outrages are described, from pointless encounters with would-be assassins and the massacre of intellectuals. Like a dark blot on the imperial record, a heated argument with Confucian scholars during a banquet led to a far-reaching extermination of classical texts, or rather, scrolls of bamboo volumes. The truth of the matter has long been obscured but a possible explanation is that Li Si, rather than the emperor, wanted to tie up loose ends in the campaign against feudal lords. The outcry from the philosopher class in 213 BCE may have been a flimsy pretext.

Sima Qian's account of the first emperor has proven extremely useful in one regard: his description of Qin Shi Huang's internment within a grandiose tomb.

"IT IS IN THE TEXT OF THE *GRAND HISTORIAN* WHERE QIN SHI HUANG'S GREATEST OUTRAGES ARE DESCRIBED"

The structure was so elaborate that the emperor's sarcophagus rested on a map representing China, or at least the parts ruled by the teetering empire, with the seas and rivers flowing with quicksilver. According to Sima Qian, the emperor's resting place was adorned with treasure and the cloisters where his murdered concubines and sages were left. This could have been a final gesture by his scheming son Wu Hai, whose brief rule also met an ignominious end.

The current evidence, especially the archaeological discoveries around the mausoleum since the 1970s, of the whole necrological building programme has worrisome gaps. If Sima Qian's record is accurate, the construction of the complex

BELOW-LEFT A dusty mound overlooking desert wastes represents the earliest efforts at layered fortifications over China's northern borders

BELOW-RIGHT The Qin dynasty began what would later become the Great Wall of China

took 38 years, with as many as 700,000 workers. Among them were artisans who toiled for a decade in kilns to mass-produce the human likenesses in clay of soldiers and civil servants alike, along with other sculptures in bronze. These simulated humans, arrayed in formations, stood around the mausoleum complex in their barracks. However, when his death at the age of 49 is considered, the emperor's mausoleum had to be constructed when he was just 11 years old, which was before he assumed leadership of the Qin kingdom. If so, why would such an expensive construction have taken place? A reason could be the far-reaching goals of the royal family that had now been shaped by at least three generations steeped in an authoritarian and militaristic ideology. The evidence of this trend is quite startling.

MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

As far as can be determined, China's most significant historical site was unearthed in the spring of 1974. Farmers were trying to dig a well northeast of Li Shan, the mountain that looms over the ancient capital, when they began pulling out an

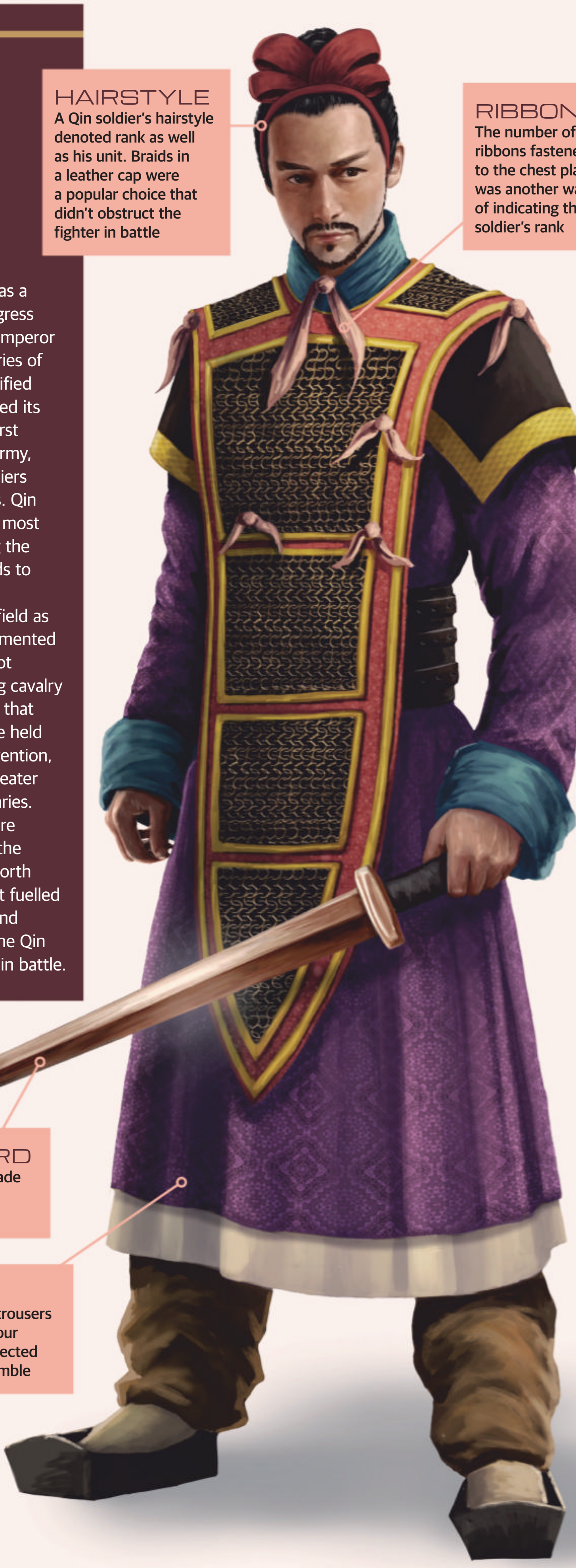
▶

Qin SOLDIER

The military that fought ruthlessly to unify China

The Qin dynasty was a period of great progress for China. The new emperor Qin Shi Huang made a series of sweeping changes that unified the country and modernised its military. In came China's first professional conscripted army, staffed by formidable soldiers and led by skilled generals. Qin soldiers used some of the most advanced weapons during the era, from sharp iron swords to powerful crossbows.

Their role on the battlefield as shock infantry was supplemented by more heavily armed foot soldiers, as well as flanking cavalry and chariots. The warriors that battled on horseback were held in the saddle by a new invention, the stirrup, giving them greater balance than their adversaries. Some of their enemies were worthy foes, in particular the nomadic tribes from the north with mounted archers. But fuelled by a desire for conquest and loyalty to their emperor, the Qin more than held their own in battle.



HAIRSTYLE
A Qin soldier's hairstyle denoted rank as well as his unit. Braids in a leather cap were a popular choice that didn't obstruct the fighter in battle

RIBBONS
The number of ribbons fastened to the chest plate was another way of indicating the soldier's rank

BRONZE SWORD
Qin swords were originally made from bronze, but were later replaced with tough iron

ARMOUR
Light robes, padded trousers and iron-riveted armour allowed the well-protected warriors to remain nimble

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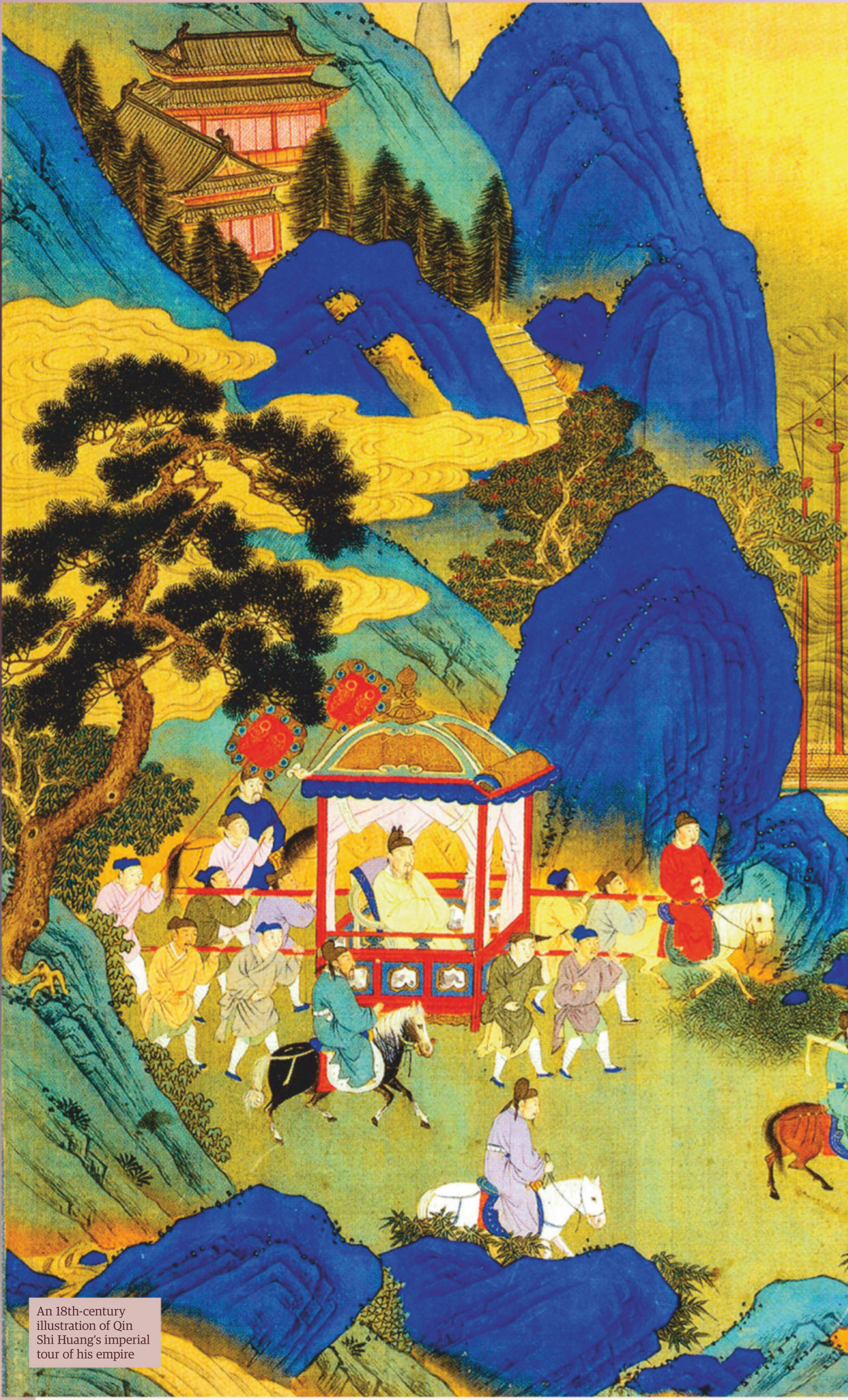
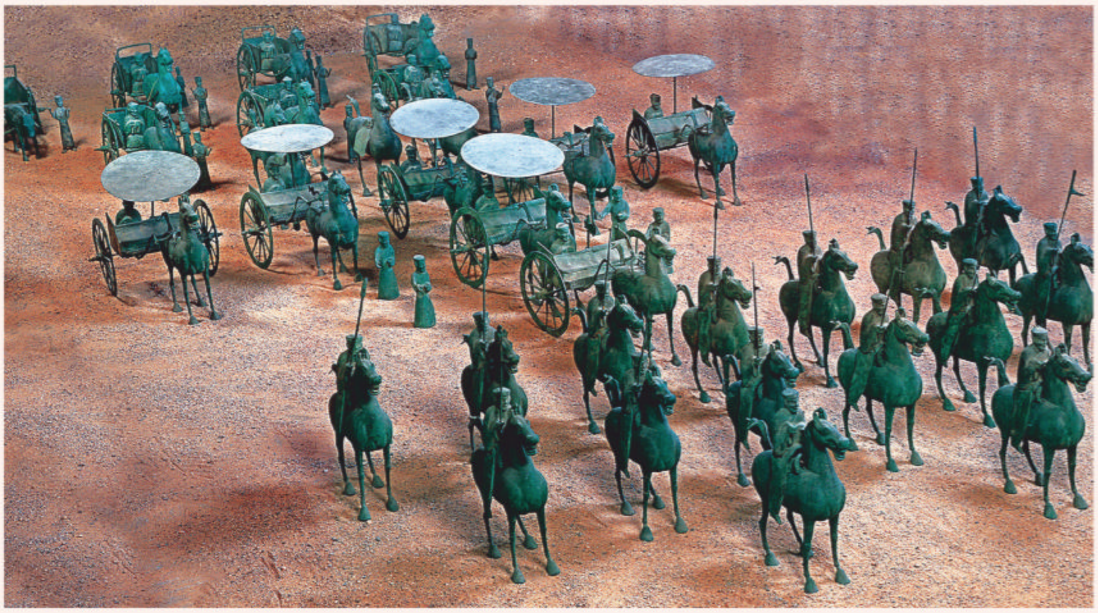


An 18th-century illustration of Qin Shi Huang's imperial tour of his empire



assortment of human appendages and clay fragments. Archaeologists who rushed to inspect the material were surprised at the discovery. From the gathered pieces they completed the life-size figures of two Qin-era soldiers. It had long been known that ancient statues were scattered around the farmlands of Xi'an, a historic city turned industrial hub. But what the archaeologists soon determined was the location of the famous terracotta army once arrayed outside the mausoleum complex and its four sections: tomb and palace, inner city, outer city and the grounds. After carefully exposing a few hundred soldiers some six metres beneath the soil, gradual work (equal parts conservation and exploration) revealed 4,000 more figures and a bewildering inventory of weapons and trinkets. The statues carried real weapons whose accidental burial had kept the blades and arrowheads sharp. In total the terracotta army formations outside the mausoleum complex were estimated to have more than 8,000 individuals, with only half of them unearthed in three carefully maintained sites.

The wonder of the terracotta army bookends the Qin empire's sometimes inadequate historical record. For it is in these statues, attired in the standardised kit of the era, where the Qin's legacy almost assumes a life of its own. After all, the statues examined by archaeologists, once freed from dirt, had the original pigmentation of their 2,000 year old commissioning. Each visage was truly distinct and it has been determined the individual identities of every soldier was deliberate – they stood at attention while artisans recreated their features on a mold shaped like a human head. Once finished, the hands and torso were assembled and then attached to a stout pair of legs. The resulting statue was baked to hardness and then painted with lacquer varnish, the weapons being fitted last.

> "THE WONDER OF THE TERRACOTTA ARMY BOOKENDS THE QIN EMPIRE'S SOMETIMES INADEQUATE HISTORICAL RECORD"

The metallurgical know-how of the Qin empire's blacksmiths is evidenced in its surviving artefacts, which outlasted everything else damaged by corrosion or human neglect. The evidence has been collected for decades, whether in the chariots buried with the terracotta formations or their armaments, and the bronze and iron work gathered so far is of such quantity one has to ponder if the Qin were justified in deluding themselves about their eternal glory. Nothing they ever set out to do was on a small scale.

It is by observing these immortalised soldiers that the Qin empire's great innovation, more than the usual reforms imposed by the emperor's bureaucracy, comes to light in spectacular fashion. The Qin had an immense war machine that involved millions, whether as conscripts or as the skilled artisans who ran the foundries and workshops producing the myriad equipment such a devastating institution required. Archaeologists today estimate there are 40,000 bronze arrows scattered around the emperor's tomb.

A true marvel of this period, a byproduct of the Warring States era in fact, was the crossbow as perfected by Qin. Its simplistic appearance – its design endured in China for thousands more years – belies its lethality. Using the form of the composite bow carried by horse-riding archers, it marries this weapon to an elongated stock with a single groove in the middle to fit a bolt or an arrow. When loaded the weapon launches its missile by pressing a bronze trigger device. In Sima Qian's own telling in the *Grand Historian*'s chronicle, the emerging Han dynasty from 205 BCE onward, with the Qin court bereft and laid to waste, had to fight a regional war with the northern Xiongnu barbarians once again. Except this time the enemy's ranks had crossbows for 300,000 men. Taken at face value the Qin and their rivals had a surplus of weaponry unlike anywhere else in the world.

NECROPOLIS NOW

The demise of Qin Shi Huang in 210 BCE was sudden and heartbreaking. Nearing his 50s and burdened by the administrative tasks of the empire, he

▶

ABOVE-LEFT The ultimate war machine of ancient China is preserved in astonishing detail

ABOVE-RIGHT This set piece of Han dynasty-era cavalry shows how chariots remained vital centuries after the Warring States era

BELOW More than 2,000 clay soldiers have been revealed through painstaking archaeological recovery work

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images

The Undead ARMY OF CLAY

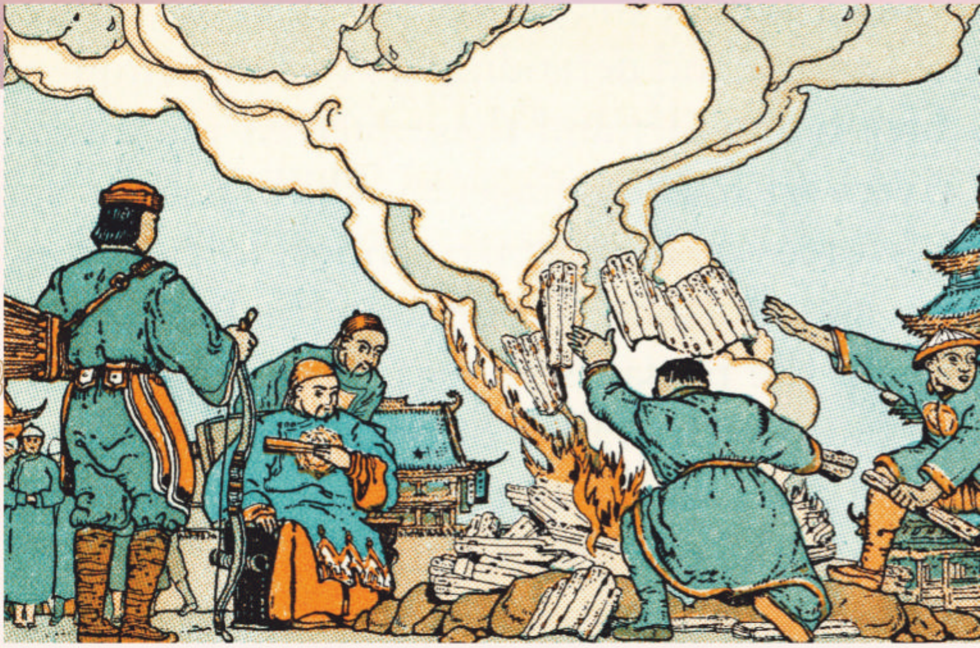
Why the Terracotta Warriors still captivate us

Every detail about the world-famous Terracotta Warriors has a cinematic quality to it, which is quite an achievement for an archaeological find that is a little over 50 years old. The chance discovery of Qin Shi Huang's mausoleum complex in early 1974 happened after farmers working the soil beneath Lishan Mountain chanced on scattered fragments.

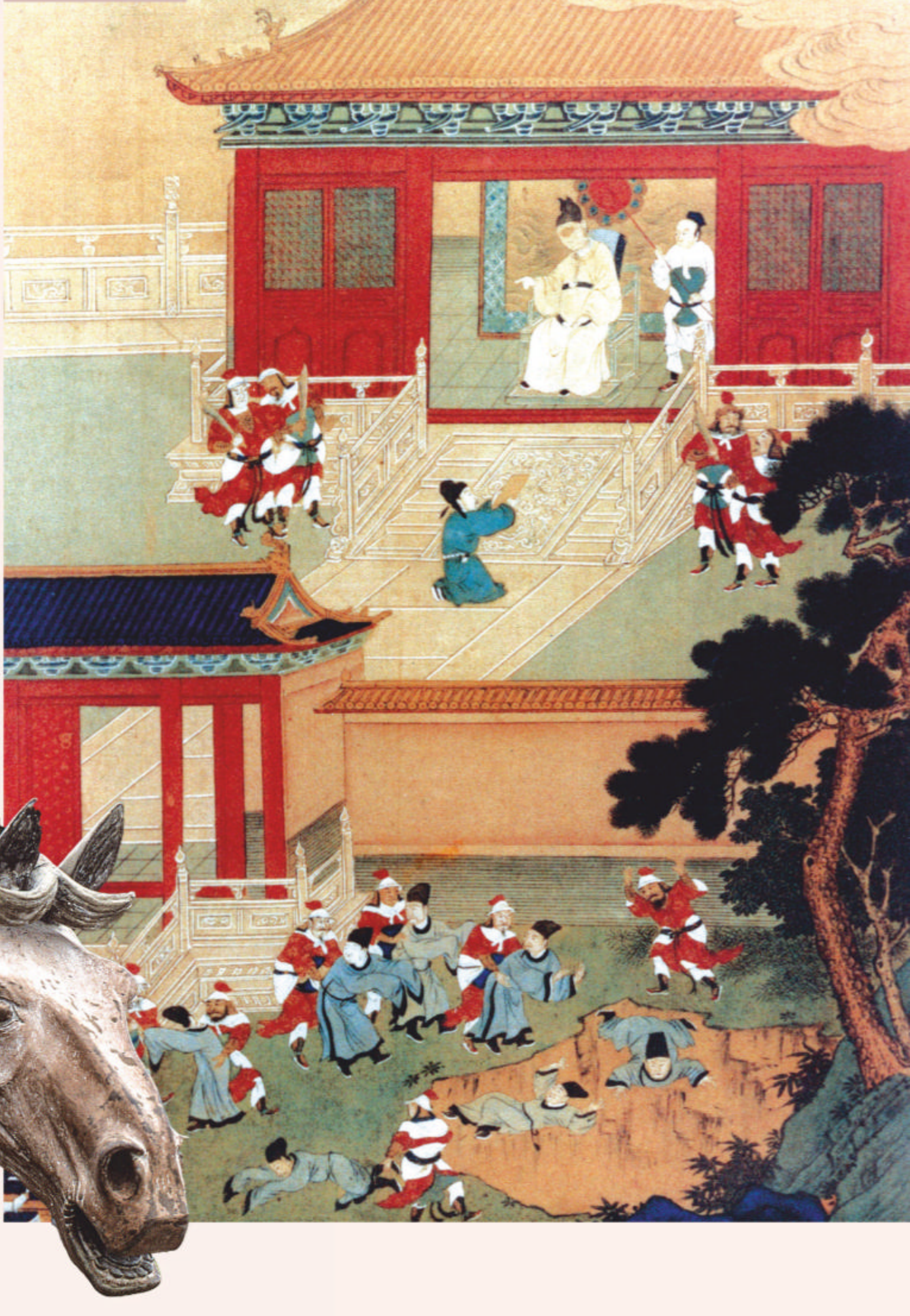
Chinese archaeologists counted several thousand to as many as over 8,000 soldiers arrayed in the three pits dug around the vast mausoleum complex, itself a superstructure long carpeted by forest. Temperature-controlled hangars now loom above the columns of figures on display for tourists – this is necessary to preserve the statues threatened by millennia of neglect and gradual destruction. The observable details of each soldier remain astonishing. Their depiction is an incredible record of a professional ground force in the 3rd century BCE, from studded plate armour to the standardised trousers and footwear. Their weapons coated in sealant and muck remained sharpened and various metal objects around them are untarnished. These span a mass-produced arsenal of weather-resistant swords and crossbows – the latter called 'nu' in Chinese – as well as the dreaded halberds.

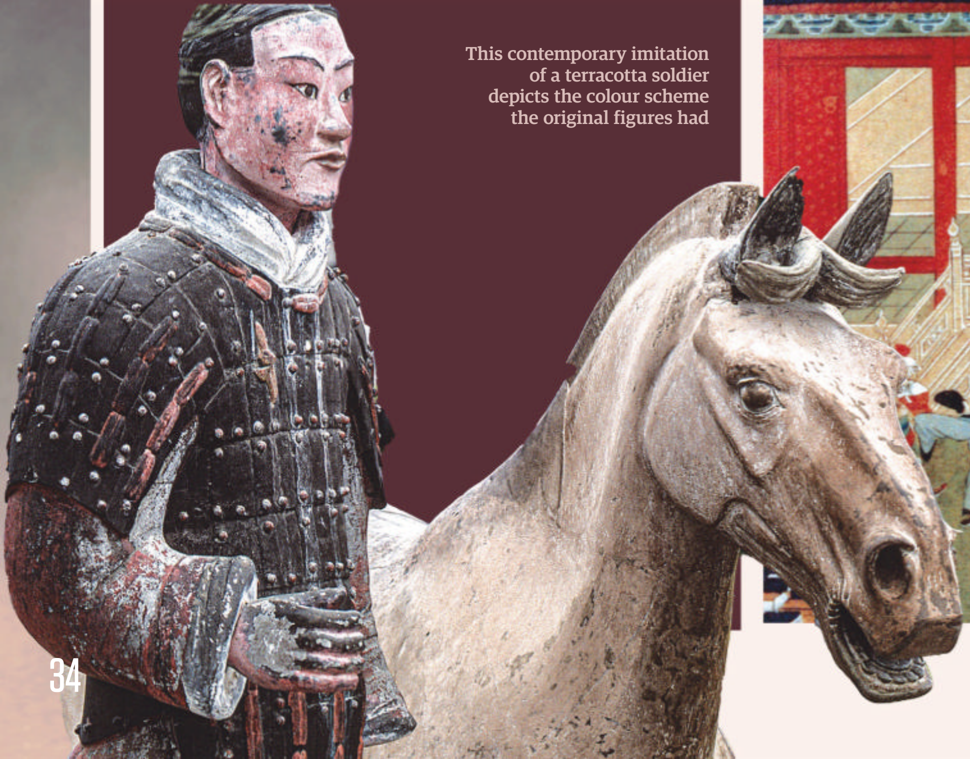
The reason for having such a vast retinue in Qin Shi Huang's necropolis intrigues scholars and non-experts alike. A popular explanation was the emperor's entire regime was fascinated by conquering the afterlife. This was from a government whose propaganda extolled their longevity for a thousand generations.

Recent studies using novel methods have established the likenesses of the terracotta soldiers were based on living individuals and were sculpted and then installed on prefabricated bodies either kneeling or standing upright.

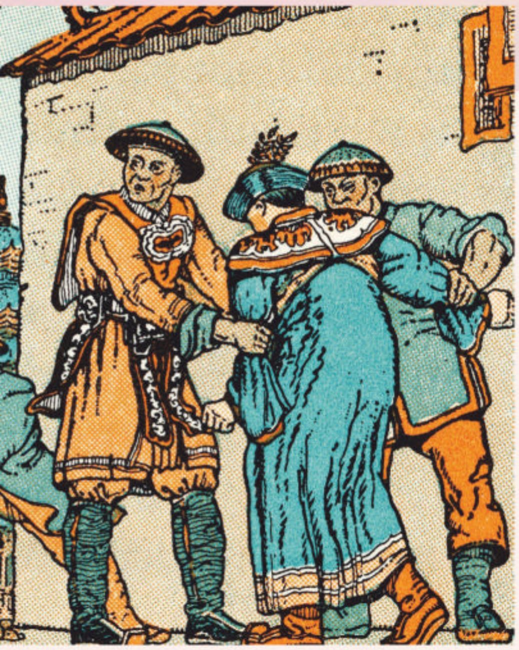


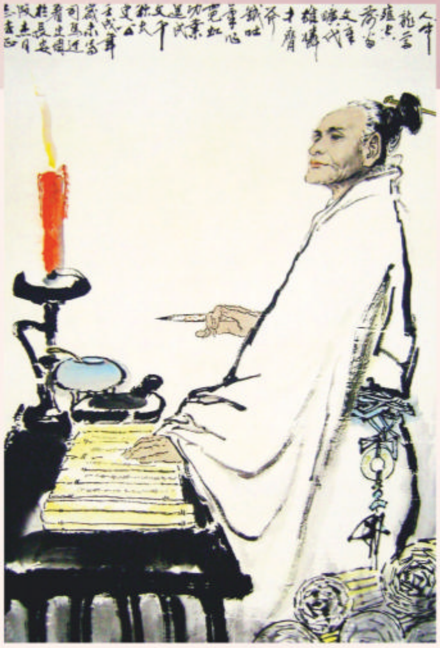
Qin Shi Huang ordered the killing of Confucian scholars





This contemporary imitation of a terracotta soldier depicts the colour scheme the original figures had





FAR-LEFT The books of Confucius were burned as the emperor looked to consolidate power

LEFT Sima Qian immortalised Qin Shi Huang's life in his historical compendium written during the Han era

fell ill in his carriage during a grand tour of public works. These journeys, first undertaken in 219 BCE, were far from an extravagance and served as a means for promoting his personality cult while troubleshooting distant infrastructure projects. The unexpected death set in motion the schemers in his own inner circle. For the minister Li Si, appearances had to be kept if Xianyang were to avoid a coup d'etat or power struggle among the princes. As the *Grand Historian* recounts, the emperor's retinue went to ridiculous lengths concealing the death before they reached the capital.

> "THE FALL OF THE QIN WAS JUST A PAUSE BEFORE A NEW IMPERIAL REGIME EMERGED"

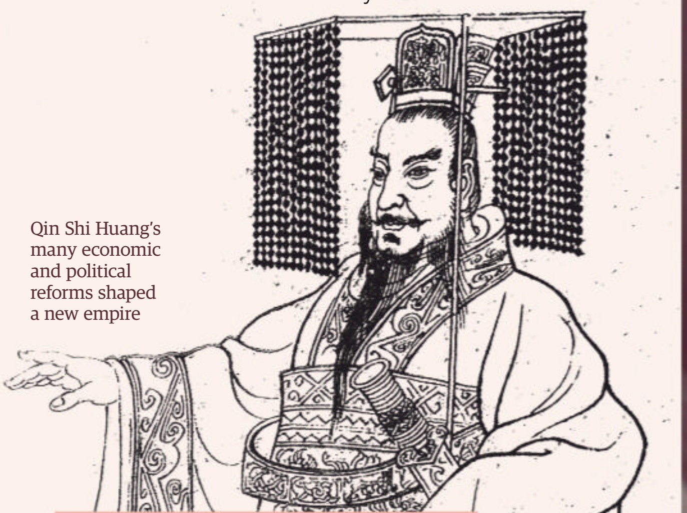
Darker plots were hatched by the prince Wu Hai, a lesser son of the emperor, who concocted a murderous deception against his eldest brother and rightful heir. A forged letter reached the capital in haste, ordering the heir's suicide along with his trusted aide. Apparently, all this bloodshed was done with the full confidence of the chief eunuch Zhao Gao. But nothing was settled. As the prince cleared his way to the throne his siblings, nearly three dozen in all, were murdered and eventually Li Si himself together with his family were eliminated. True to moralistic Chinese storytelling (there is no evidence this happened) Li Si met a gruesome end when his body was sawn lengthwise in a public execution. Just desserts awaited the treacherous Zhao Gao and the new emperor as well. Barely a handful of years as the lawful Qing Er Shi, rebels overran Xianyang and threw him out. He too was dealt a terrible vengeance.

But the fall of the Qin was just a pause before a new imperial regime emerged. Two officials vied for the imperial mantle in a brief civil war and the victor was a career civil servant, Liu Bang. Assuming the title of Emperor Gaozu, he inaugurated the Han era but faced the usual difficulties of state builders; the problems learned men such as Lu Buwei and Li Si spent their lives tackling. The administration and public works had to be continued and the army had to be maintained. A terrible regional war erupted in the north, where the Xiongnu had gathered strength for almost 20 years. The Han state was immediately put to the test and from the 2nd century onward the protracted warfare with the northern barbarians justified a hegemonic empire. It is assumed that it was only in 54 BCE when the Xiongnu threat subsided and the Han dynasty trudged along for another 200 odd years.

As the Qin were cast aside, the pillars they laid down remained. An official language and writing system endured, as did the elite education required of civil servants, and the planning of giant construction projects was a constant in every century since. The farmers and their tracts of arable land remained the building block for a true national life, and later dynasties contended with the financial burdens and welfare that such an economic system produced.

Strangest of all was despite the passage of millennia, the vanquished Qin kept their necropolis. The first emperor's tomb containing riches that dazzled the imagination remained untouched and the farmers who eked out their trades in the plots around Li Shan mountain never bothered to explore the intriguing mound covered by trees. Nor did the scattered remains of various statues inspire controversy. Unlike the guardians of the emperor's resting place, time marched on and the seasons obscured the former grandeur of the tomb complex to near complete erasure. Passed on from one dynasty to the next, Sima Qian's summaries of emperor's lives transitioned from tumultuous eras and great events, be it the drama among the contentious three kingdoms or the industrial revolution that swept the Tang dynasty.

The Chinese appetite for fiction and theatre immortalised the tyranny of Qin Shi Huang and his outrageous crimes, evidence be damned. The myth of national unity enforced by strongmen resonated with the Chinese in the 19th and 20th centuries. When China came under communist rule in 1949 the Qin Empire's story grew to form both a critique and praise for dictatorship. Since the 2000s enshrining and memorialising Qin Shi Huang as a far-seeing, if morally flawed, saviour rather than a historical villain has become popular. His burial complex is as it was 2,000 years ago, fairly remote and wrapped in legend. There he lay entombed, lost in time but not lost to memory. ○



Qin Shi Huang's many economic and political reforms shaped a new empire

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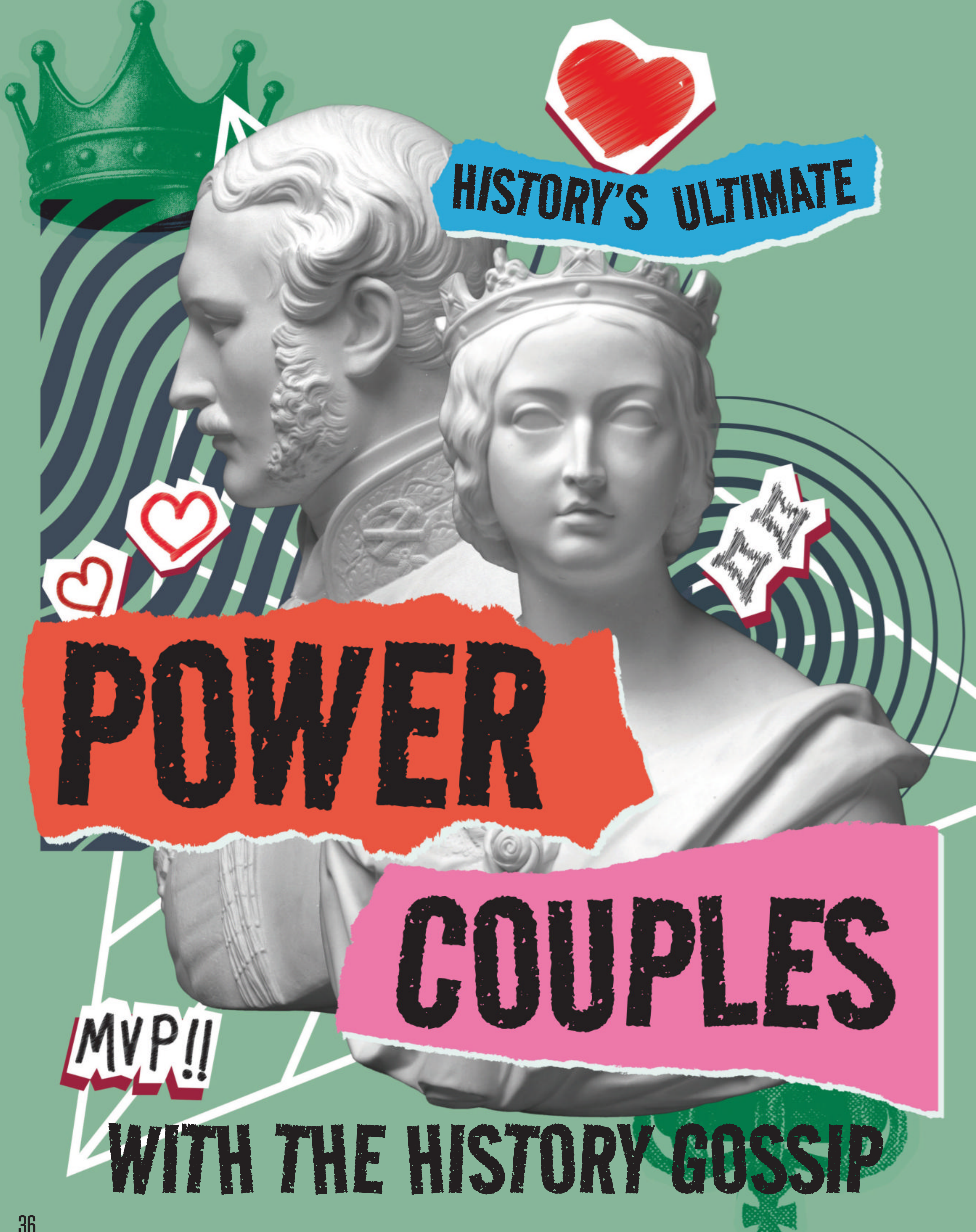


HISTORY'S ULTIMATE

POWER COUPLES

WITH THE HISTORY GOSSIP

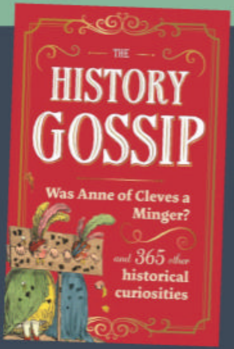
TikTok sensation Katie Kennedy brings her signature wit as she joins us to delve into the romantic lives of historical lovers

Written Emily Staniforth

Historically, romantic relationships between two important figures have tended to either hinder or help the individuals in the union. Some spouses supported each other in their careers and others were damaging to their other half. And then there have been a few partnerships that have gone down in history as legendary, where one half of the couple is rarely remembered or considered without reference to the other.

These couples may have been powerful and influential, but were they a good match for one another? We invited social media star Katie Kennedy, also known as The History Gossip, to give her unique take on some of history's most notorious power couples and rate their relationships and private lives. With nearly 615,000 followers on TikTok, a show on Sky History TV and a book, Katie has made a career out of applying her own brand of humour to the past, making videos on topics ranging from the sex lives of kings and queens to the personal hygiene habits of the Georgian working classes. Zoning in on the shocking, salacious, hilarious and rarely discussed aspects of the past, The History Gossip is known for her wit and humorous style, which is making the past accessible and bringing history to a whole new audience.

THE HISTORY GOSSIP: WAS ANNE OF CLEVES A MINGER? AND 365 OTHER HISTORICAL CURIOSITIES


THE
HISTORY
GOSSIP
Was Anne of Cleves a Minger?
and 365 other historical curiosities

(MICHAEL O'MARA BOOKS, 2024) BY KATIE KENNEDY IS AVAILABLE TO BUY NOW

HISTORY CRUSH WITH KATIE KENNEDY IS AVAILABLE TO WATCH ON SKY HISTORY CHANNEL. YOU CAN FIND KATIE ON TIKTOK AND INSTAGRAM @THEHISTORYGOSSIP

VICTORIA & ALBERT

MARRIED 1840-61

Queen Victoria and her husband Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg were married at St James' Palace in 1840. Victoria had fallen for her first cousin from the moment she met him at her 17th birthday party and entries from her diary show her to have been completely infatuated with her husband from the beginning of their relationship.

For The History Gossip, the Victorians are common fodder on her social media. "I love the Victorians. Honestly, I feel like they're so easy to take the mickey out of," Katie explains as we start to discuss the Victorian monarchs. "All of the stuff that they got up to like wearing arsenic dresses, putting chalk in bread, shagging your cousin - that was normal. Looking back you just think why did they do stuff like that? But I feel in 200 years time people will look back on us and go why were they putting plastic in their faces? Why were they on a phone for 12 hours a day?"

When describing Victoria and Albert's relationship, Katie reviews it fairly concisely: "Cousins by blood, lovers by choice." Despite her wry summing up of the couple and their shared DNA, Katie is convinced by the pair's love for one another. "I went to the Royal Albert Hall the other day as well and it was so nice how [Victoria] commemorated Albert [after his death in 1861]. She was just besotted with him, absolutely besotted." She adds: "They were obviously in love and if you see her diary entries, it's quite sweet... I think that's the nicest thing I've said about them ever!

"[Victoria] gifted [Albert] a portrait of her with her hair down and it's basically the equivalent of sending nudes; they definitely had that spice so that's good. I feel like that's what you need in a marriage to keep it going, don't you?" However, with regards to Victoria's lengthy period of mourning for her husband, The History Gossip is less effusive, describing the queen as having "a face like a slapped arse for the next 40 years." Elaborating, she says: "She was just miserable. In her kids' wedding photos, she's all in black and they have to pose around a bust of Albert. I just think: 'Oh my God, pack it in!'"

8.5/10

ABOVE Victoria and Albert were married for 21 years and had nine children

INSET The sultry 'selfie' Victoria had painted for her husband

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images

MEET THE HISTORY GOSSIP

When Durham University student Katie Kennedy uploaded her first history-themed video to TikTok, she never expected to become an internet sensation

"I always knew I wanted to go into the history space and do something in the media and public history and make it fun for people. I grew up watching *Horrible Histories* [a BBC historical comedy sketch show] and I was obsessed. I was in my final year of doing my degree at Durham and I was a bit bored. I was doing my dissertation and I knew I wanted to do something. I thought: 'I'll start a TikTok and I'll see what happens with it. I'm not expecting anything.' I'd seen what different historians do when they're a bit serious and they talk about facts. I thought no one sounds like me, so I'm going to have to soften my [northern] accent a lot and just present the facts how they are. [The videos] were doing all right but nothing was popping off. I started relaxing with it and I stopped caring as much about how people would perceive me because I always thought people were going to think I'm some thick little northerner. I did a video called *Was Anne of Cleves a Minger?* and then it started doing really well.

I remember I blocked everyone I knew at uni because I was embarrassed and I didn't want people knowing that I was posting videos that were getting three views. Then that video got reposted on a few pages on Instagram, the meme pages, and I stopped getting as embarrassed about it. Then I did a series on the Victorians and again, I just started adding humour to them. I started cracking jokes and it's just gone from there. It's been so weird and I'm so grateful with how it's gone and I love the way I talk about history. I learn if it's fun and entertaining so I'm really glad that that's how other people have found it as well. Then I got a book deal and that was weird because I didn't think I'd start writing anything until I was well into my 30s or had a PhD. I definitely felt imposter syndrome and I still feel it now. But I'm enjoying it very much and if I can keep going with it for as long as I can, then I'll be happy. I'm really, really grateful. It's cool. It's weird, but it's nice."

ELIZABETH II & PRINCE PHILIP

MARRIED 1947 – 2021

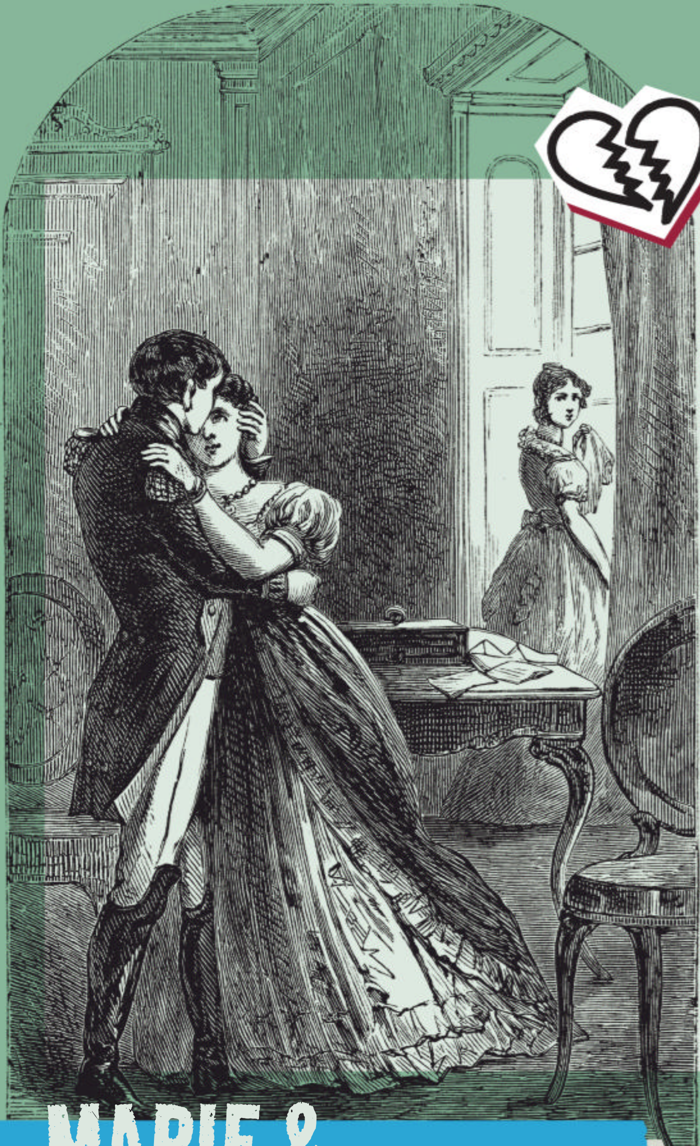
LEFT Elizabeth and Philip presented a united loving front throughout 73 years of marriage

In 2021, millions of people around the world witnessed Queen Elizabeth II attend her husband's funeral, sitting alone and in mourning in the chapel during the global pandemic. Their long marriage had been a constant source of rumour and speculation, though to the public the couple always presented a united front. Having married in 1947 before Elizabeth ascended to the throne, the couple remained together for 73 years. Katie is cautious to discuss the relationship, saying: "I feel like that's quite recent history, so I have to be a bit more careful about what I say. I don't know if *The Crown* has influenced my opinions but I feel he was up to no good [and] had an affair. But I feel like they were steady and she just had to put up with the sh*t. She couldn't exactly have a messy divorce so I really respect her for putting up with that because I would not. He would be straight out the door!"

During the earlier portion of their marriage, there were a number of rumours concerning Philip's relationship with other women, though nothing was ever confirmed. Regardless of the gossip, Elizabeth publicly praised her husband on a number of occasions, describing him as her "strength and stay" and their marriage as an "outstanding working partnership". Reports have also stated that Philip was equally fond of his wife and allegedly affectionately referred to her as "Cabbage", a nickname which Katie sums up as "embarrassing".

When considering Elizabeth and Philip in more recent years, towards the latter end of their lives, Katie has a more positive opinion of their relationship: "They're a bit like chalk and cheese... towards the end when you saw them a couple of years ago and at events they were like your grandma and granddad. I feel like they were each other's person towards the end after they went through a lot together. I think she needed him as much as he needed her."

7/10



NAPOLEON & JOSÉPHINE

MARRIED 1796 – 1810

When starting to talk about Napoleon Bonaparte it becomes abundantly clear that Katie is not his biggest fan: "I don't like Napoleon. I just don't like him. He had the worst comb-over." The French emperor is best known for his authoritarian rule and his series of military campaigns that saw his forces take control of territory across Europe from 1796 onwards. He married Joséphine de Beauharnais, the former wife of a French politician who had been executed during the Reign of Terror, in 1796 after they met at a party the previous year. Following their marriage, Napoleon promptly left on a military campaign and the pair would spend little time together, though they continued to communicate via letters. "He was besotted with [Joséphine]", says Katie, before adding: "I think this was a very toxic relationship. He was writing her letters being like, 'Why aren't you replying? I'm at war. Miss you. Love you lots.' And then he binned her off for a younger model."

In 1809, Napoleon told his wife he wanted a divorce, with many historians citing Joséphine's inability to get pregnant and provide Bonaparte with an heir as the main reason for his decision. In agreeing to divorce the emperor, Joséphine gave up her status as empress, a position that had afforded her wealth and influence and allowed her to pursue her interests in the arts (of which she was a patron) and fashion. However, the pair remained close friends even after Napoleon had married again, suggesting that the divorce did not negate the love they felt for each other. "It's a heartbreak and maybe they couldn't get over it," suggests Katie. "I feel like he [needed an heir] and she was older, wiser and she probably knew a thing or two and then it wasn't meant to be and he had to marry someone else. Bless her, I feel like she would have been upset but I feel like if you were married to Napoleon, you're better off [without him], aren't you?"

6/10

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LEFT Napoleon and Joséphine's marriage ended because Napoleon needed an heir and his wife could not give him one

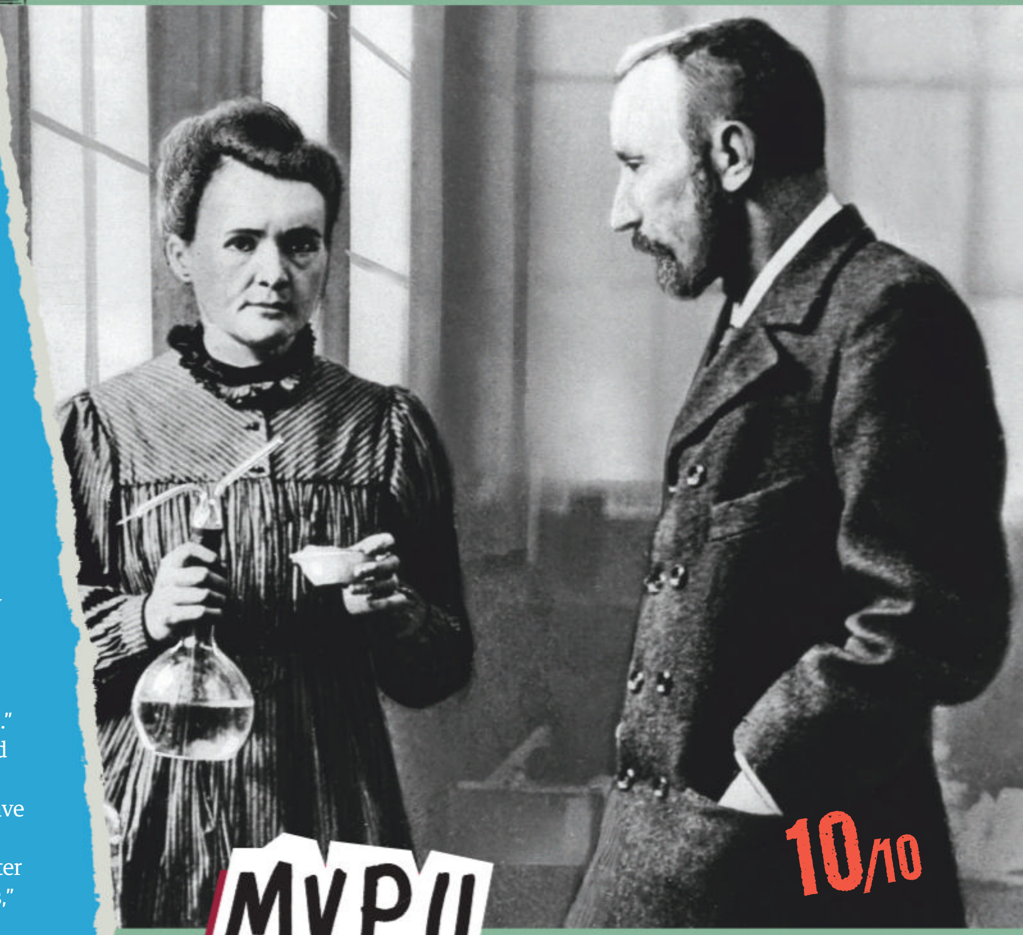
BELOW Married Nobel Prize winners Marie and Pierre Curie working in a laboratory

MARIE & PIERRE CURIE

MARRIED 1895 – 1906

Though not political leaders, Marie and Pierre Curie were one of history's most influential couples due to the contributions they made to modern science. Polish physicist Marie met French scientist Pierre when she was studying in Paris in 1894 and together they embarked on shared scientific projects, most famously discovering polonium and radium in 1898. In recognition of their significant work in radiation phenomena, in 1903 the pair became the first married couple to win a Nobel Prize.

All the evidence points to the Curies having a happy and successful marriage based on a mutual respect for each other and a shared intellect and passion for science. "They were obviously nerds!" says Katie of the Curies' lifelong dedication to their research. "They remind me of people at university. Just really nerdy but really lovely and they just sit in the library and all they do is read. Their love language is just sitting and reading and being intellectual and boring. But good for them!" Katie's praise for the couple continues: "They actually helped the world and then [Marie] slowly died because of the radiation." In 1934, Marie died of aplastic anaemia caused by her prolonged exposure to radiation and had to be buried in a lead coffin. Pierre had died in 1906 in a road accident, though historians have suggested that he too would have suffered from the effects of radiation exposure if he had lived. "They [suffered] for the greater good and I feel like that's quite romantic because it was selfless," explains Katie. "They burned bright."



10/10

MVP!!

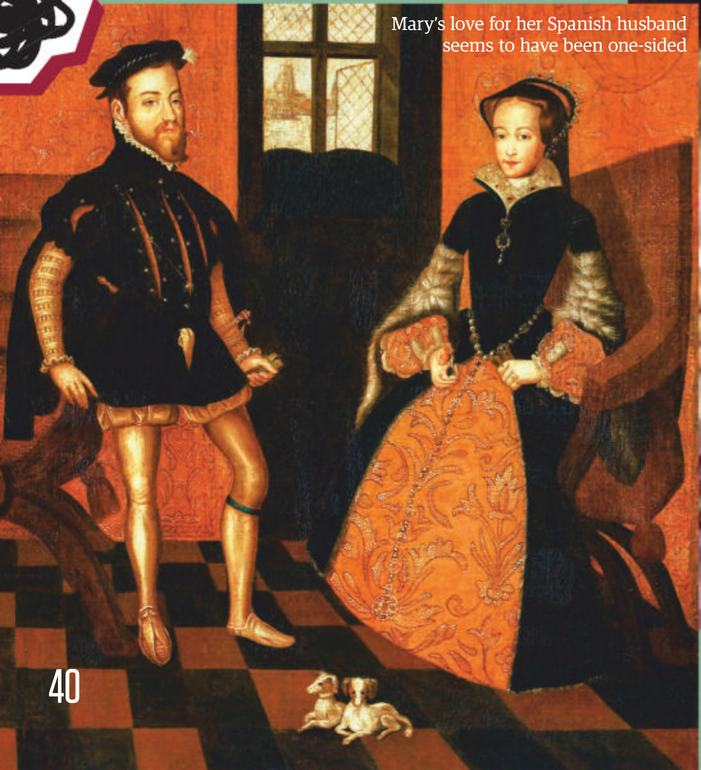
MARY I OF ENGLAND & PHILIP II OF SPAIN

MARRIED 1554-58

As Queen of England, Mary I had her choice of suitors. But the man she picked would prove to be a controversial choice among both her courtiers and subjects. In 1554, the Tudor Queen wed Philip II of Spain, a fellow Catholic who would become King of Spain in 1556, sparking fears that England may become a pawn in Spain's political ambition. For Mary, the choice to marry seemed to have been made out of love, but Philip's inclination to take Mary as his wife appeared to be purely a political decision. "I just feel like she was in love with him. She was obsessed. He couldn't really be arsed," surmises Katie as we discuss the disparity between Mary and Philip's feelings.

"He wasn't really in England a lot," explains Katie, referring to Philip's decision to spend much of his time abroad apart from his wife. "I just feel like he couldn't be bothered. It's like when it's bin day tomorrow and you're like, 'I can't be arsed to put the bins out.' I feel like that's how he felt about shagging her." Despite Philip's reluctance to spend intimate time with his English wife, Mary did believe she was pregnant on a couple of occasions with the child she desperately wanted. However, both these pregnancies were phantom pregnancies and no baby ever existed, causing great mental strain for Mary and putting increased pressure on her marriage. The symptoms she experienced were possibly due to an undiagnosed illness. When Mary died in 1558 at the age of 42, she was alone and her husband was nowhere to be seen, having undertaken a military campaign in the Netherlands. "I really feel sorry for her because she yearned for someone who couldn't give a sh*t," says Katie. "I feel like she just needed a good Taylor Swift album to cry too."

3/10



Mary's love for her Spanish husband seems to have been one-sided

MARY & PERCY SHELLEY

MARRIED 1816-22

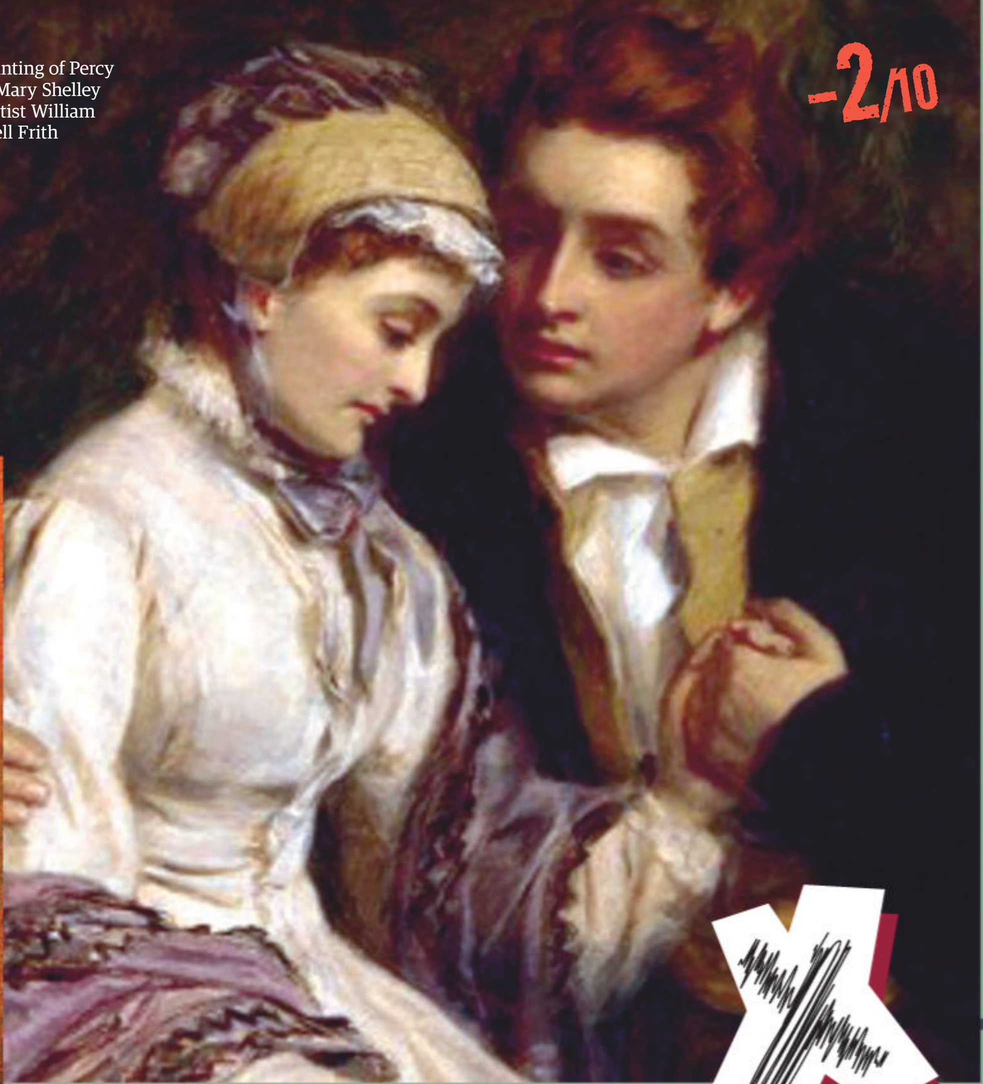
"If you start your relationship by losing your virginity on your mum's grave, where can you go from there? Downhill?" observes Katie as soon as the 19th century authors Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley are mentioned. Though it has never been proven, historians believe there could be some truth to this shocking tale from the Shelleys' relationship, with much of the couple's early courtship taking place in the cemetery where they would walk and read together. Their relationship began in 1814 when Mary was 16 and Percy was 21 and married with a child on the way. Regardless, Mary fell for the poet and the two ran away to France together, where they conceived a child. Sadly the child died, as did two others. "I feel sorry for Mary because obviously she grieved a lot when she lost her kids. She kept having these dreams where she lost her baby but in the dream she warmed her up by the fire and it brought her back to life, which is really sad," says Katie.

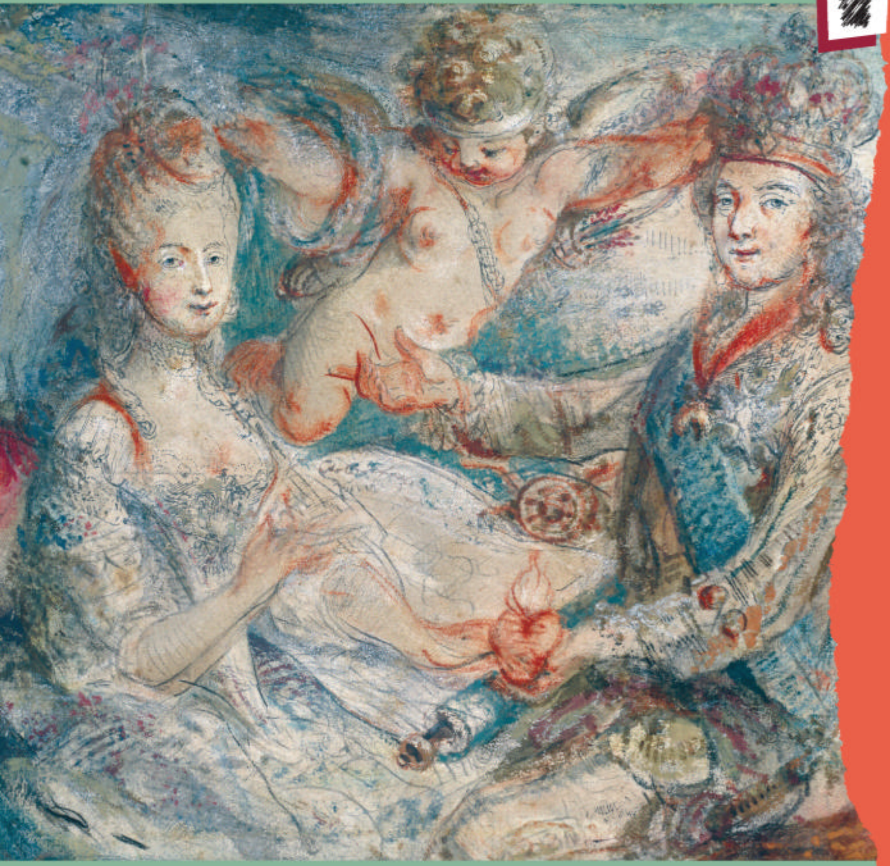
Tragedy seemed to follow the couple and in 1816, Percy's wife, Harriet, was found dead by suicide. Percy and Mary married shortly afterwards, though Percy was not a faithful husband, with many historians believing he had an affair with Mary's half-sister. "It was the messiest relationship," remarks Katie. "It's just bizarre when you read about their lives because you can't believe that it was real. When you think of that era, you think everyone's so prim and proper and polite, and then you've got them."

Despite the turbulent times of their relationship, the Shelleys were a powerful and influential couple of their day, not just as writers but also as radical thinkers. The Romantic poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley was an inspiration for later generations of philosophers, authors and politicians, while Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* remains one of the most celebrated works of Gothic fiction in history. In fact, Katie's rating of the couple's relationship is boosted a point due to her regard for Mary's groundbreaking novel: "It's not a minus three because *Frankenstein*'s quite good."

A painting of Percy and Mary Shelley by artist William Powell Frith

-2/10





ABOVE Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette remain controversial figures in France's history

MARIE ANTOINETTE & LOUIS XVI

MARRIED 1770-93

The last of France's monarchs, Louis XVI and his bride Marie Antoinette met their demise at the hands of French revolutionaries. In 1770, the Austrian archduchess Marie and French prince Louis were married as part of an agreement between their two families. Four years later, Louis ascended the throne, marking the beginning of an 18-year-reign characterised by extravagance and grandeur on Marie's part and hesitant and neglectful decision-making on the part of the king. Though controversial figures, The History Gossip is sympathetic towards the tragic pair. "I really love Marie. I know even now when I post videos about her she's quite controversial," says Katie, who explains that some negative comments regarding Antoinette cited her penchant for spending extravagant amounts of money. "Joséphine [Bonaparte] spent more money on clothes than Marie Antoinette ever did so I feel sorry for her... I feel like they were sort of victims of circumstance because again they didn't [know any different] and it's just how they were brought up."

Regarding Louis and Marie's personal relationship, Katie quips "she allegedly loved cake, but he waited seven years to eat hers" in reference to the fact their marriage was only consummated seven years after their wedding. On a more serious note, Katie points out that the marriage was a stable one despite it being arranged. "She was just sort of paired up with Louis. I feel like Louis was canny because he never took up a mistress and I feel like they had a good strong relationship, but he was more interested in making clocks. [Marie] did have an affair though with a Swedish count but I think [Marie and Louis' relationship] was probably more like a friendship. With the seven years [to consummate the marriage] I think there was something going on with him that we don't officially know. There was definitely something downstairs that wasn't working."

7/10

CLEOPATRA & JULIUS CAESAR

TOGETHER C.47 BCE – 44 BCE

To keep hold of her throne, Egyptian Queen Cleopatra embarked on a mission to seduce Roman leader Julius Caesar in order to gain his political support. Upon their meeting in Alexandria, Caesar was said to be enchanted with Cleopatra, though their ensuing partnership was one of mutual advantage. Cleopatra gained Rome's political support while her riches helped finance Caesar's ambitions. "[Cleopatra] apparently had really good chat and she was really smart and she could speak different languages so I feel like she easily wooed him," says Katie of Caesar's attraction to the Egyptian queen. "He was clearly in love but I feel like he thought with his trousers a lot." But Katie is less sure about whether the romantic feelings were mutual between the pair. "You can't tell with Cleopatra. It's like, do you actually fancy this man or do you want to keep Egypt safe? I feel like she must have done [a bit]. If you pop out a kid and you go the whole way, you can't exactly not fancy someone," she suggests in reference to Caesar and Cleopatra's son Caesarion, who was born in 47 BCE.

Despite being unsure about Cleopatra's relationship with Caesar, Katie is more enthusiastic about the queen's subsequent Roman lover Mark Antony. Of the notorious couple's suicides in around 30 BCE, she says: "I'm really sad that her and Mark Anthony never made it the full way and they died. I feel like that was real love." But regardless of whether Cleopatra and Caesar were soulmates, Katie expresses her admiration for the lengths the queen was willing to go to to secure her throne: "She put in the graft to keep Egypt and I respect her hustle. She managed to pull two really powerful leaders and she just did what she had to do and it got her quite far. So I respect her, she's great."

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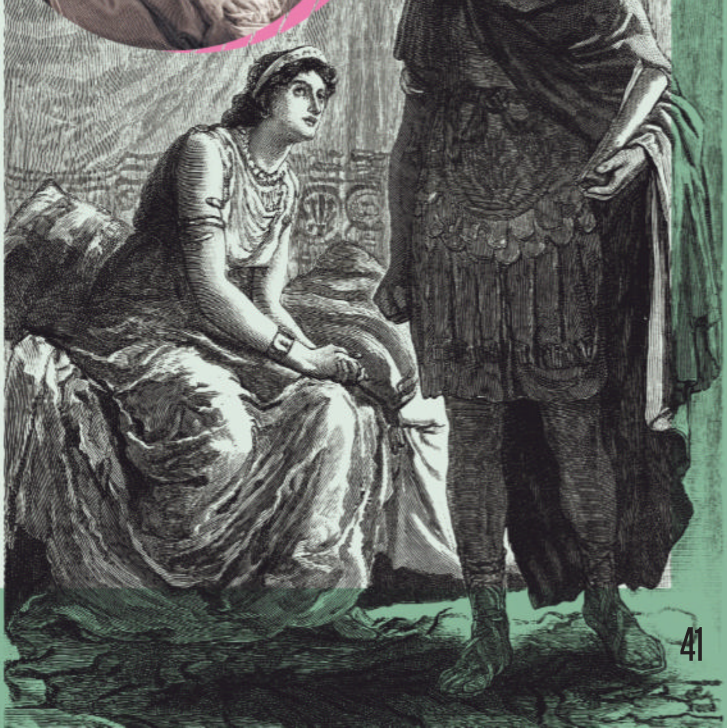
INSET After a humiliating military defeat, Cleopatra and her lover Mark Antony killed themselves



BELOW-RIGHT The relationship between Cleopatra and Caesar was born out of political needs

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images

THUNDERBIRD 2
2

PUPPET MASTER

THE GERRY ANDERSON STORY

AS *THUNDERBIRDS* CELEBRATES ITS 60TH ANNIVERSARY, WE EXPLORE THE LIFE OF THE MAN WHO BROUGHT MARIONETTES TO THE MAINSTREAM

Written by Callum McKelvie

The plane descends. The Fireflash - an atomic-powered hypersonic aircraft. If it lands, it will detonate a bomb onboard. If it doesn't, then the passengers will die from radiation poisoning. But there is hope. International Rescue are on their way in their special rocket vehicles - the Thunderbirds. To the generations of children who watched that first episode, it didn't matter that their heroes were not in fact actors but puppets. Now celebrating its 60th anniversary, *Thunderbirds* was just one of a number shows produced by the legendary Gerry Anderson that utilised a unique style of puppetry, nicknamed Supermarionation.

From the underwater escapades of *Stingray* to the intergalactic war of *Captain Scarlet*, chances are if you saw these programmes during their original broadcast, then you have fond memories of these action-packed series. And yet, for all his success, Anderson longed to leave the world of marionettes behind for the glamour of live-action productions. But just how did a young film editor become one of the defining voices of 20th children's television? It's a tale far stranger than any mission undertaken by Joe 90...

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images, © Shutterstock

RIGHT Gerry and Sylvia Anderson alongside some of the 'cast' of *Stingray*. Sylvia co-created many of the iconic series alongside her husband

STANDBY FOR ACTION

Anderson was born in the Bloomsbury area of London in 1929. Ten years later, he became one of the many children evacuated from the capital when war was declared between Britain and Germany. But the conflict was to have a far more devastating effect on the young boy's life. His older brother Lionel Anderson, a flight sergeant in the RAF, was killed on 27 April 1944, only 13 days after Gerry's 14th birthday. Before his tragic death, Lionel delighted his brother with tales of his daring exploits, including stories of a brief role in a 1942 propaganda film. Its name? *The Thunder Birds*.

When the time came for Anderson to pursue a career of his own, he settled on becoming a plasterer. Except he soon discovered that he was allergic to plaster and those ambitions were quickly put to rest. He then found himself stumbling into the British film industry, training as an editor for the Colonial Film Unit. By 1955, the 26-year-old was working for the troubled Polytechnic Films, when he, cinematographer Arthur Provis and several others decided to establish a company of their own. "Pentagon Films was formed purely to make commercials, or documentaries, or anything we could get," Provis recalled. "There wasn't a lot of work around in those days."

In 1956 Pentagon Films produced a Kellogg's commercial featuring a puppet of Enid Blyton's character Noddy, quickly followed by a short film, *Here Comes Kandy*. Both caught the attention of children's author Roberta Leigh, who was looking for a company to produce her series *The Adventures of Twizzle* – and to do it cheaply. Leigh was adamant that it was to be a puppet show. "I'd never seen a puppet in my life and [I] grew to hate them very quickly," said Anderson. Little did he know that this early work with marionettes would come to define his career.

To produce *Twizzle*, Anderson and Provis set up a new company, AP Films, and despite their initial reluctance, production began in 1957. The resultant series, about a toy called Twizzle that had the ability to stretch his limbs to extraordinary lengths, was a success. The marionettes were built by puppeteer Joy Laurey from papier mâché with painted-on-faces, lacking any form of expression. When Leigh proposed a follow up, *Torchy: The Battery Boy*, Anderson was determined it would feature more advanced puppets with moving eyes and mouths.

But trouble was brewing. "Roberta Leigh was a very rich lady and very difficult to get on with," said Provis. "She wanted her own way on every single thing." Finding the working relationship impossible, Anderson began making puppet series without the author's input, starting with the western *Four Feather Falls*. Around this time Provis left AP Films. He and Leigh would later produce their own puppet shows, including a 1964 pilot for a series called *Paul Starr*. But according to author Ian Fryer, the pilot demonstrated the pair "couldn't muster the production values to compete with the Anderson productions."

SUPERMARIONATION

Without Leigh, Anderson was free to devise projects of his own. *Four Feather Falls* came to an end after 39 episodes, but despite its relative success, AP Films was in financial

> "I'D NEVER SEEN A PUPPET IN MY LIFE AND I GREW TO HATE THEM VERY QUICKLY"

TOP-INSET Sylvia Anderson's legacy has been largely overlooked

MIDDLE-INSET *Thunderbirds* pioneered an advanced puppetry technique known as Supermarionation

BOTTOM-INSET The inclusion of lip-sync technology in the puppets' craniums led to the enlarged heads, now so familiar

trouble. Hoping to capitalise on the growing interest in science-fiction, Anderson aimed for the stars with his next series, *Supercar*. Piloted by Mike Mercury, the titular vehicle could fly, travel underwater and even in outer space. Behind the scenes, the series introduced the use of electronic pulses to sync the mouth movements to pre-recorded dialogue. To describe this unique style of puppetry, Anderson coined the term Supermarionation.

Supercar also saw the injection of much-needed financial backing from Lew Grade's ITC films. Grade would bring many classic TV series to the airwaves, among them Jim Henson's *The Muppets,* and by 1961 he had already scored a major hit with *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. Initially balking at Anderson's figure of £3,000 per episode, Grade proposed that if Anderson could half his budget, he would greenlight the project immediately. The next morning, Anderson returned with only one-third cut. For some time, Grade vanished into an adjoining room while Anderson listened anxiously to the murmurings of conversation. When Grade returned, he proclaimed: "OK, you got yourself a deal. But I want it on the air in six months!" Only later did it transpire that the room Grade had vanished into was, in fact, a cupboard.

The success of *Supercar* saved AP Films from bankruptcy, and for their next project Anderson and Grade hoped to further exploit the public's burgeoning fascination with science-fiction. *Fireball XL5* told the story of Steve Zodiac as he flew around the universe, visiting strange alien worlds. Released in 1962, it proved to be another resounding Supermarionation hit. Soon after, Anderson received an urgent phone call from Grade demanding a meeting. "I have decided," Grade announced upon Anderson's arrival, "to buy your company."

Grade's increased involvement gave Anderson's next project – the aquatic-themed *Stingray*, released in 1963 – the distinction of being the first British TV series to be filmed entirely in colour. As well as its technical achievements, *Stingray* was more complex in its characterisation than the earlier programmes. Key to this was the love triangle between the hero Troy Tempest, his girlfriend Atlanta and the beautiful, but mute, Marina. "The hope was always that it would continue for another series and they'd just keep on and on," Anderson's son Jamie told the *Radio Times* in 2024. "But Lew Grade always wanted something new."

THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO!

"It's going to be expensive," Anderson warned Grade as he pitched his concept for the follow-up to the monumental success of *Stingray*. Anderson had been inspired by events at the Lengede-Broistedt mine in 1963 when 50 miners became trapped underground. The proposed series would show the adventures of International Rescue, a private organisation run by ex-astronaut Jeff Tracey and his five sons. In their fleet of rocket ships, submarines and spacecraft, they respond to various disasters across the globe. The name of Anderson's new project? *Thunderbirds*.

First broadcast in 1965, *Thunderbirds* was unlike anything that had been seen on television before and was a success far beyond the wildest dreams of Anderson and Grade. Yet despite Anderson's name being the most closely associated with *Thunderbirds*, it would be wrong to suggest that its success (and that of the other Supermarionation programmes) was due solely to him. It was the work of an immensely talented team, from the bombastic musical scores of Barry Gray to the special effects work headed on *Thunderbirds* by Derek Meddings. But one figure whose presence looms large is that of Anderson's then-wife Sylvia.

▶

NO STRINGS ATTACHED

As well as his renowned puppet-based programming, Anderson also worked on a number of live-action shows

JOURNEY TO THE FAR SIDE OF THE SUN **1969**

Based on an unproduced teleplay, Anderson's only major live-action feature film tells the story of an astronaut who lands on a parallel Earth. The film was unsuccessful, not helped in part by the release of *Planet of the Apes* and *2001: A Space Odyssey* the previous year.

UFO **1970**

Anderson's first live-action television series follows the organisation SHADO as they prevent incursions by organ-harvesting aliens. The programme used many props, costumes and even actors that had appeared in *Journey to the Far Side of the Sun*. Despite work beginning on a second series, the show was cancelled.

THE PROTECTORS **1972-73**

An action-thriller series that starred The Man from UNCLE himself, Robert Vaughn, as Harry Rule. The titular Protectors are a secret organisation led by Rule and sworn to protect the innocent. The series followed in the footsteps of earlier ITC adventure series such as *The Saint*.

SPACE 1999 **1975-77**

Based on the unproduced second season of *UFO*, this was the most expensive television series of the time. A cerebral first season saw actors such as Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing and Brian Blessed guest star before an overhaul saw season two develop a more action-adventure narrative.

SPACE PRECINCT **1994-95**

Anderson's return to live-action science-fiction, this was based on a 1986 pilot he had produced called *Space Police*. The series was Anderson's most ambitious yet, costing $36 million and blending comedic moments with darker elements. A hit in Europe, it failed to find an audience in the US.

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MARIONETTE MAGIC

Stephen La Rivière of Century 21 Films discusses how he and his team keep the legacy of Supermarionation alive

Tell us a little about Century 21 Films and why you use Supermarionation?
Century 21 Films is a production company that, in addition to its regular work, has a specialised sideline in making new Supermarionation productions. I've always thought that Supermarionation has an almost unique appeal. It's a cul-de-sac of filmmaking that has endured against the wave of new ways of doing things, probably because it's unlike anything else. Despite its slight cool toys-come-to-life feeling, there's also an immense sophistication to the art. I always thought it would be nice to resurrect it, but the chance didn't come along until my documentary *Filmed in Supermarionation* in 2014. We shot new sequences with Lady Penelope, Parker and Brains. And then, once we'd shown it could be done again, new projects followed – starting with making three 'new' episodes of Thunderbirds in 2015.

What projects has Century 21 Films worked on using Supermarionation?
Thunderbirds: The Anniversary Episodes was our biggest production. For the 50th anniversary we went back to Slough, dragged some of the old crew with us, and made *Thunderbirds* like it was 1965. Then we did an advert for Halifax, and an episode of the *Inspector Morse* prequel *Endeavour*. For that we shot puppet and effects sequences for a 'fake' Supermarionation show. During the pandemic we put some of these puppets and models to use in a series made under lockdown conditions for YouTube called *Nebula-75*. Despite the intention to make a single short, its popularity meant it became a full series, sold to Japanese television, and it has recently been selected for official preservation by the British Film Institute.

What challenges does working with the puppets present?
They're very attractive on screen and can save the world, but in real life they're very uncooperative! Despite being very simple in modern animatronic terms, they are still prone to malfunction, and a snapped wire always causes headaches. The biggest challenge, though, is to film them properly. To look good they need to shoot at certain distances on certain lenses – something that others who have tried to revive it always get wrong. We fully embrace the old techniques.

Do you rely solely on the techniques developed by Gerry Anderson and his team, or do you ever incorporate modern technology?
Overwhelmingly we shoot the old way, but we have done a few shots digitally – usually combining two elements to mimic an old-fashioned effect. Optical printers don't exist anymore, so we have to have a digital equivalent that produces analogue-looking results!

© Century 21 Films

Initially hired as a secretary for Pentagon Films, Sylvia proved a force to be reckoned with and a romance quickly blossomed between her and the ambitious producer. Alongside her husband, it was Sylvia who co-produced, and indeed co-created, many of the Supermarionation shows, with her input just as integral as his. Her influence is particularly prevalent on *Thunderbirds*, where she not only helped craft the concept but also provided the visual inspiration and the voice of Lady Penelope, one of Anderson's most iconic characters. "Sylvia was, without doubt, the most important part of AP Films," recounted special effects director Brian Johnson.

In 1966, AP Films changed its name to Century 21 Productions, reflecting the bold space-age programmes it had been making. That same year the company embarked on its most ambitious project yet – taking the *Thunderbirds* to the big screen. Unfortunately, *Thunderbirds Are Go!* wasn't the hit that the Andersons had expected. Despite this a sequel, *Thunderbird 6*, was released two years later but it also suffered from poor box office receipts.

The latter film was not helped by the fact that the television adventures of International Rescue had already come to an end. Grade, always seeking new, fresh programming, had cancelled the series in 1966. Nonetheless, despite its relatively short run, *Thunderbirds* is without doubt Anderson's most iconic creation. Reflecting on his career, he said: "*Thunderbirds* was the high. As important as characterisation is, I think the sheer action and adventure of that series was unbeatable."

SPECTRUM IS GREEN

The cancellation of *Thunderbirds* came as a surprise to Anderson: "I went to see Lew and I thought he was going to say: 'Let's go on with *Thunderbirds*.' But he said: 'I want a new show'." By this point, Anderson's interest in puppetry was beginning to wane. The success of *Thunderbirds* had been unprecedented but he had tired of working with marionettes, yearning to produce live-action films with real actors. His follow-up, 1967's *Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons,* used more realistically proportioned puppets and featured a darker tone and increased violence. The show would be responsible for terrifying an entire generation of children.

"I got to see a fairly early copy of it [the script] and suddenly realised we were moving on to something quite different,

TOP-RIGHT Gerry Anderson on the 40th anniversary of *Thunderbirds*. The 1990s and early 2000s saw a revival of interest in his iconic TV shows

TOP-INSET *Captain Scarlet*, the follow-up to *Thunderbirds*, adopted a much darker tone

BOTTOM-INSET *Terrahawks*, released in 1983, used advanced hand puppets that Anderson nicknamed Supermacromation

darker, less frivolous," recalled effects designer Mike Trim. While the result was popular, *Captain Scarlet* could never quite live up to the monumental success of *Thunderbirds*. While the less family friendly tone made the programme more divisive, it has also seen the series become something of a cult classic.

Following *Captain Scarlet*, Anderson and his team made two more Supermarionation shows, *Joe 90* in 1968 and *The Secret Service* in 1969. While both followed the tried-and-tested format of action-adventure stories with science-fiction elements, neither was a particular success. "I had been making puppet films for years on the basis that if I did them well enough someone might give me a break to make some live-action films," Anderson recalled on *The Electric Theatre Show* in 1983. "And that was really what I wanted to do."

LIVE AND LIFE ACTION

After years of trying to break away from working with puppets, Anderson's dream came true when he and Sylvia produced the live-action science-fiction film *Journey to the Far Side of the Sun* (also known as *Doppleganger*) in 1969. Despite being considered a financial and critical failure, it nonetheless provided Anderson the experience to continue producing live-action series, beginning with *UFO* in 1970. "I remember thinking, isn't it wonderful – the actors speak and their mouths work dead in sync with the dialogue and there are no wires," he later recalled.

UFO was followed by the *Protectors* in 1972 and *Space 1999* in 1975. While these shows were extremely popular, they never proved quite as iconic as his Supermarionation work. Furthermore, Anderson was facing a number of personal issues. In 1975, following the first series of *Space 1999*, Gerry and Sylvia separated, divorcing five years later in 1980. Much of Sylvia's contribution to Anderson's programmes was erased, and she received little credit for her work. Later in life she would act as a creative consultant on the 2004 *Thunderbirds* film and have a cameo as Lady Penelope's Great Aunt Sylvia in the 2015 *Thunderbirds* reboot.

With the heyday of the 1960s behind him and with difficulties in his personal life, Anderson found it increasingly hard to find work. It would be six years after the production of *Space 1999*'s disastrous second season until Anderson produced another series. *Terrahawks* was a return to puppetry but not to the style that had thrilled audiences during the 1960s. Nicknamed Supermacromation, these were in fact a form of hand puppet and utilised developments pioneered by Jim Henson. *Terrahawks* was notably bizarre but nonetheless popular and three series were produced. One episode featured a song that included the lyrics "SOS, International Rescue hear us calling" – a reference to Anderson's greatest success.

> "*THUNDERBIRDS* WAS THE HIGH. THE ACTION AND ADVENTURE OF THAT SERIES WAS UNBEATABLE"

ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE IN THE NEXT 30 YEARS

Then, in 1991 something strange happened. The BBC began to broadcast repeats of the original *Thunderbirds* series, beginning with the first episode, *Trapped In The Sky*, on 20 September. It was watched by seven million viewers, far exceeding the broadcaster's wildest expectations. Subsequent episodes continued to achieve similar figures and repeats of Anderson's work became a staple of the BBC's schedule for the rest of the decade, capturing the imaginations of a whole new generation of children.

Gerry Anderson died on Boxing Day 2012 and Sylvia in March 2016, but their unique legacy continues to live on. Ironically, it's the same use of puppetry that Anderson resented during his career that has given the shows a unique, timeless quality. In 2023 his son Jamie commented about the revival of interest in the 1990s: "They [the young viewers] thought that it had been made for them recently. There was no concept that they were already watching a 30-year-old piece of television!" 60 years after the original broadcast, the *Thunderbirds* continue to 'go' and they, along with their fellow Supermarionation stars, show no signs of slowing down.

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Written by
Prit Buttar

WAR FOR THE EAST

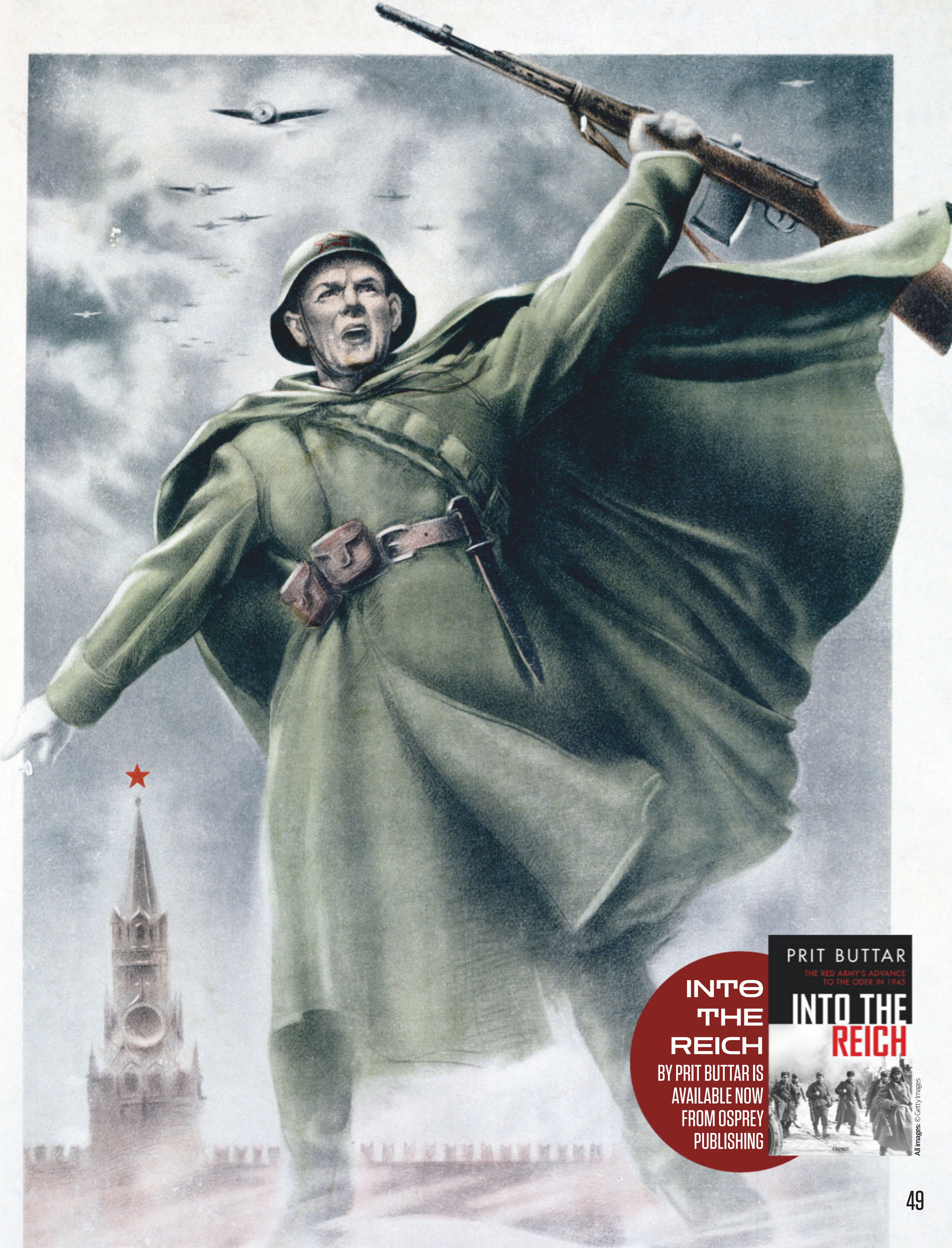
How the Red Army pushed back German forces and what they discovered in their wake as WWII turned

A TURNING TIDE

The Germans advanced rapidly in 1941 before coming to a halt before Moscow. In 1942, partly by concentrating their resources in the southern sector, they were able to resume their advance and reached Stalingrad and the Caucasus. Thereafter, the tide was almost constantly flowing in the other direction. After a disastrous start, the Red Army had learned how to fight a modern war in the most difficult circumstances imaginable, and fought with increasing confidence and capability. At the same time, the Germans found themselves operating under ever tighter constraints. Fuel had always been critically short, and earlier German advances were largely possible through the careful stockpiling of fuel supplies beforehand; by late 1942, there were few opportunities for this. The highly trained and skilled NCOs on whom the Wehrmacht depended suffered heavy losses, greatly reducing the tactical advantages the Germans had at first enjoyed. And Hitler's increasing interference and micro-management deprived commanders of the flexibility and improvisation that was a key part of German military doctrine.

HOMECOMINGS

Many of the soldiers of the Red Army were from the regions that they now recaptured. They often found that their families and friends had suffered terribly at the hands of the occupiers, facing the risk of murder, starvation, mistreatment and forced deportation as slave labour. Rapidly, word spread through the Soviet units as civilians told Soviet soldiers of their suffering and directed them to the locations of mass graves. Soviet propaganda rapidly exploited such evidence, using it to strengthen a desire for revenge among Red Army troops. This served many purposes. Firstly, it kept soldiers motivated. Secondly, it ensured that memories of Soviet excesses in the 1930s were rapidly forgotten in the light of more recent events.



INTO THE REICH

BY PRIT BUTTAR IS AVAILABLE NOW FROM OSPREY PUBLISHING

PRIT BUTTAR

THE RED ARMY'S ADVANCE TO THE ODER IN 1945

INTO THE REICH

OSPREY

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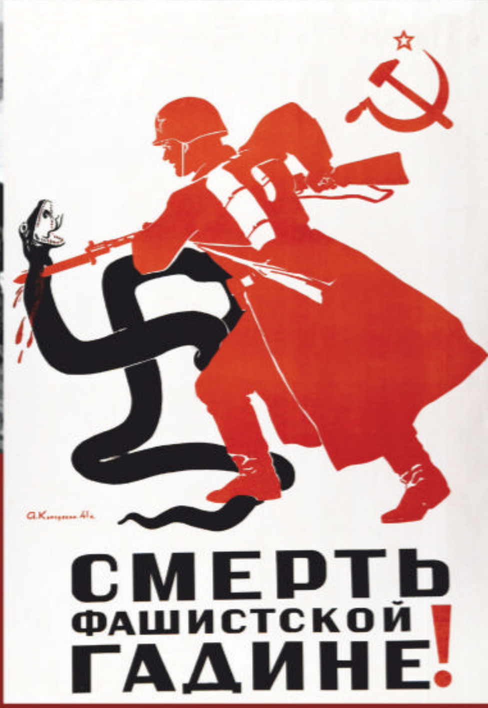
THE COUNTEROFFENSIVE

The first counteroffensives took place in the winter of 1941-42, recovering ground to the west of Moscow. From late 1942 onwards, Soviet troops advanced in a series of surges across eastern and central Ukraine, and after the failure of the Germans to break into the Kursk salient in 1943 the Wehrmacht was also driven back on the central sector. In 1944, almost all of Ukraine was cleared of German occupation and the invaders were driven back from Leningrad, before the massive hammer blow of Operation Bagration smashed the German Army Group Centre, carrying the Red Army across Belarus and much of Latvia, Lithuania and eastern Poland to the gates of Warsaw.

> “HISTORICALLY, UKRAINE WAS A VITAL SOURCE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE AS WELL AS INDUSTRIAL GOODS”

THE WAR FOR UKRAINE

Historically, Ukraine was a vital source of agricultural produce as well as industrial goods. Moreover, the Donbas region was a rich source of raw materials, ranging from coal to numerous ores. The loss of this region in 1941-42 deprived the Soviet Union of substantial resources, and when the Red Army retook a devastated Ukraine in 1943-44 the wrecked mines and factories were rapidly put back into production and urgent steps were taken to re-establish Ukrainian agricultural productivity. However, it would take several years for Ukraine to reach pre-war productivity levels.


Г.Кокорекин 41г.
СМЕРТЬ ФАШИСТСКОЙ ГАДИНЕ!

TRUSTING SOURCES

Many Soviet accounts are problematic, for many reasons. Firstly, those that were allowed to be published in the decades immediately after the war had to comply with Soviet orthodox views of the history of the war. Stories of heroic young communists were widespread, and although many - perhaps most - were at least based on fact, they gave at best a distorted view of history. The many errors of Soviet operations and tactics and the terrible losses suffered as a result of these blunders were distorted or simply ignored. The crimes of the Germans were widely publicised, but crimes committed by Soviet troops as they advanced were taboo.

After the end of the Soviet era, many surviving veterans wrote about their experiences in a more open manner, but they were doing so from a distance of half a century. This inevitably led to further distortions and omissions.

However, being aware of the shortcomings of Soviet and later Russian accounts of the war should encourage researchers to question the accounts that were written by Germans after the war, or by Western soldiers. These too are only partial pictures of the war; in the case of the German accounts of the Eastern Front, the Wehrmacht is almost completely whitewashed of its complicity in dreadful crimes.

TARGET: BERLIN

It was probably at the time of the Stalingrad battles that Stalin first began to think seriously about the shape of post-war Europe. This would serve multiple purposes. Firstly, seizing a 'buffer zone' in Eastern Europe would greatly reduce the risk of the Soviet Union suffering such a catastrophic attack again. Secondly, the western frontiers of the Soviet Union would be moved further west; the Baltic States had been effectively annexed shortly before the German invasion, and the new frontiers would allow Stalin to retain most of the eastern parts of Poland that he had seized in 1939. Thirdly, the intention was to weaken Germany so there would be no threat of a resurgent German state attempting to recover lost territories in the east. The only practical way of achieving this last objective was to ensure that Germany was occupied by its foes, and Stalin certainly wasn't going to leave this to the Western Powers. Consequently, occupation of what would become East Germany was something that was at least considered from early 1943 onwards, and inevitably this would involve Berlin. So it's likely that occupation of Berlin was a relatively early objective. There was little or no prospect of a negotiated end to the war, particularly as the scale of German war crimes in occupied parts of the Soviet Union became increasingly clear (and in any case, the Western Allies had made clear that they would accept only unconditional surrender). This almost ensured that if Stalin was to be in a position to impose his will on Eastern Europe, and particularly on Germany, the Red Army would have to occupy the entire region.

THE 'LIBERATED' EAST

Many Soviet civilians were treated with grave suspicion by the returning Soviet authorities. Had they collaborated with the Germans? In parts of Ukraine and particularly in the Baltic region, many civilians had been hostile to Soviet rule and they treated the return of the Red Army as the replacement of one occupier by another. There was widespread anti-Soviet partisan activity in these regions for many years, leading to violent reprisals and killings. Further west, where the Soviets established client regimes in the Balkan region and in Poland and Czechoslovakia, there were added layers of hostility. For the Poles, there were unhappy memories of Russian rule of much of Poland prior to the First World War, and there was little enthusiasm for the new Soviet empire that now extended so far to the west. There was also a strong sense of betrayal in Poland, where many people felt that the British and French had entered the war when Germany attacked Poland in 1939, but thereafter had done little or nothing to help restore Poland to its pre-war status.

INTO THE REICH

In some respects, the recurring question for me when I researched and wrote *Into the Reich* was: why was the Wehrmacht still fighting so hard, when final defeat was surely inevitable? The answers are complex: a few still believed in final victory; many wished to hold back the Red Army and the atrocities that could be expected in the hope that the Western Allies would occupy most of Germany; others had good reason to fear personal reprisals at the hands of the Red Army. For the Soviet soldiers, this was for most their first encounter with Poland and then Germany, and the shock that a nation as advanced and as wealthy as Germany could attack the relatively impoverished Soviet Union drove the desire for vengeance to still greater heights. Undoubtedly, the conduct of German forces in occupied territories was appalling, whether it was in the depths of the Belarusian forests or in the death camps and slave labour camps of Poland, but the advancing Soviet troops brought with them a wave of violence and slaughter that was in many respects little better.

War is terrible, and ordinary people often find themselves committing terrible acts; this book shows some of the consequences of those acts, triggering further appalling crimes. Inevitably, those who suffer are almost always those who are simply unfortunate enough to be in the path of such implacable regimes.

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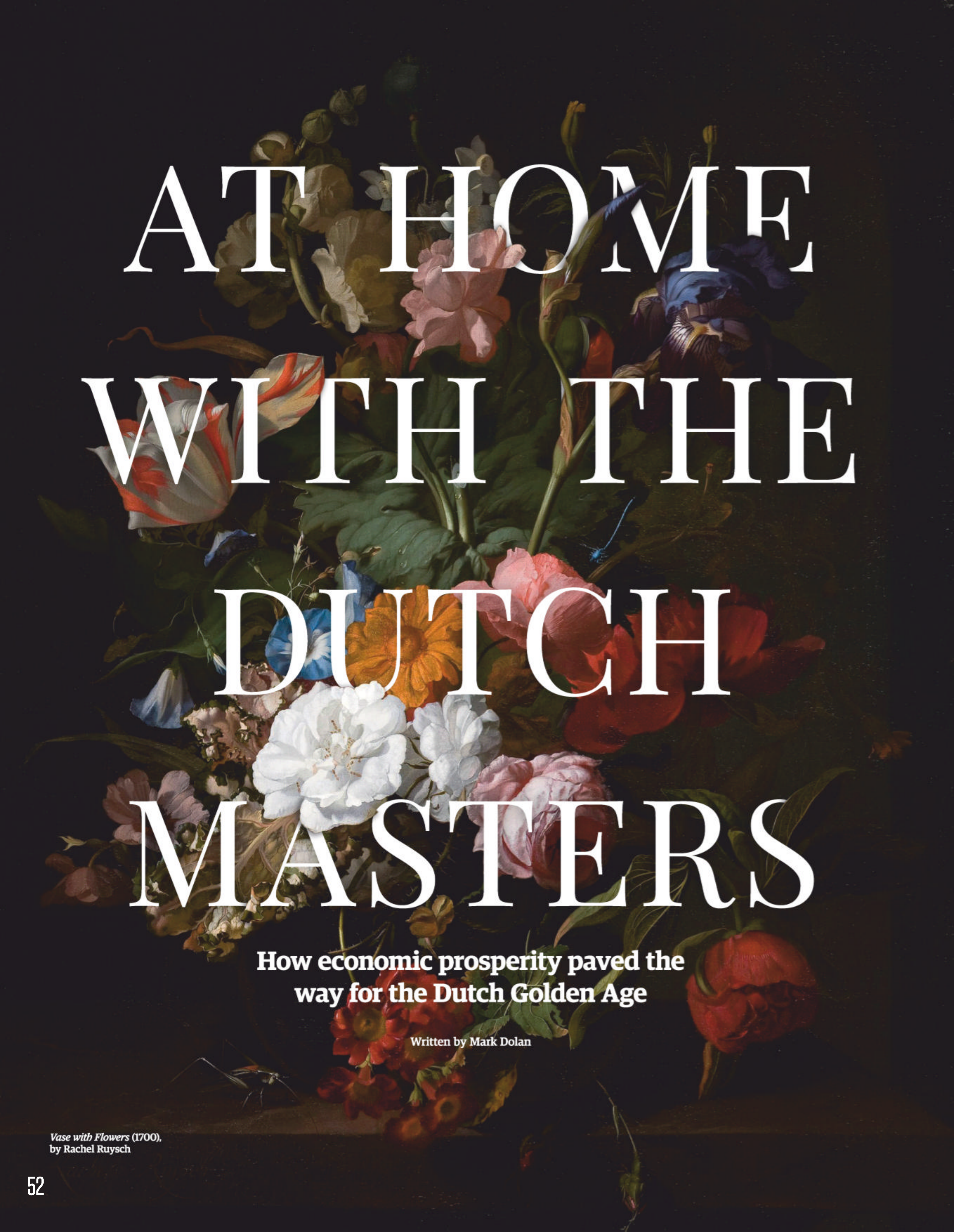
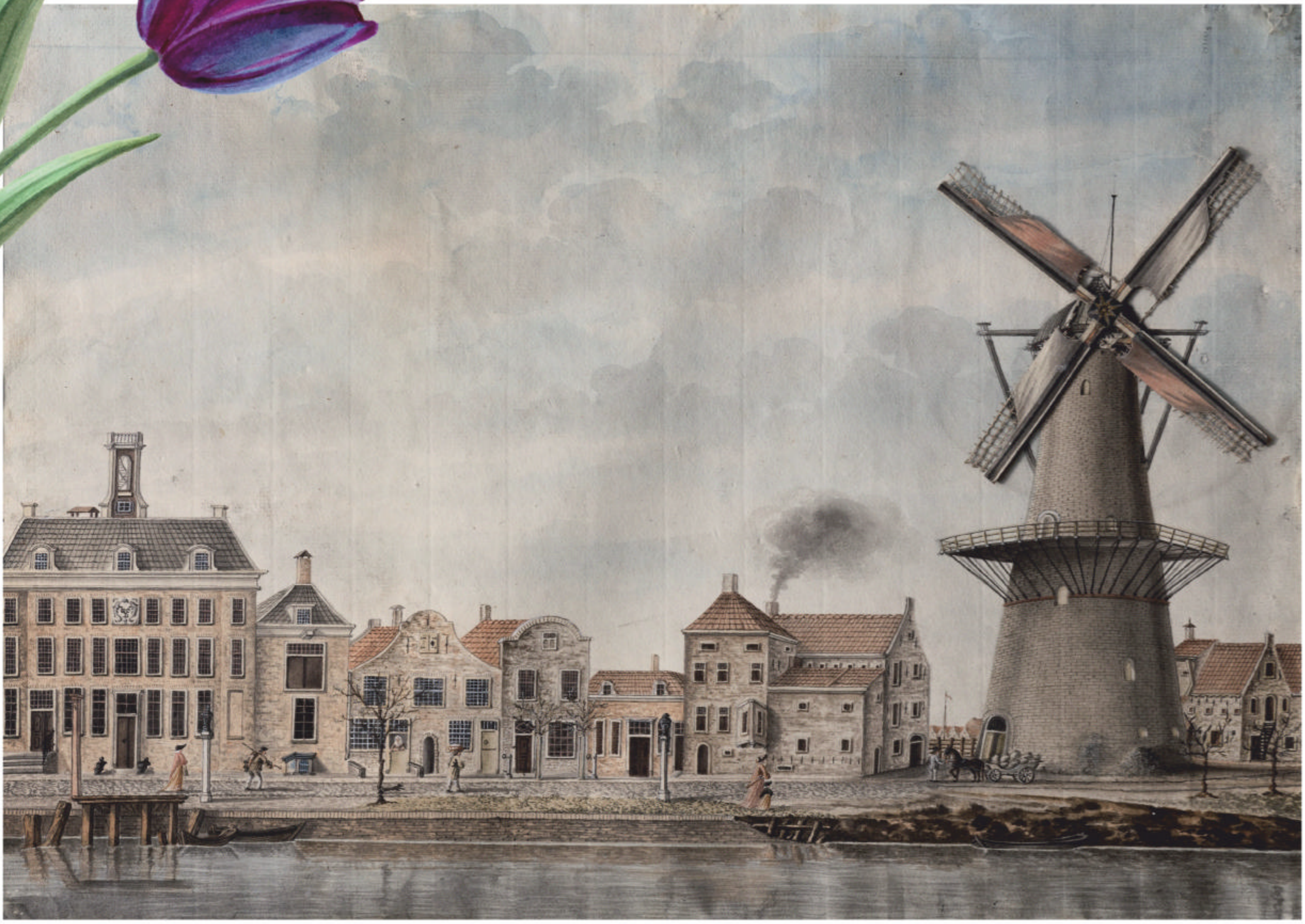


AT HOME WITH THE DUTCH MASTERS

How economic prosperity paved the way for the Dutch Golden Age

Written by Mark Dolan

Vase with Flowers (1700), by Rachel Ruysch



ABOVE The city of Delft during the Dutch Golden Age

The Dutch Golden Age, a period of unprecedented economic prosperity in the Netherlands that spanned most of the 17th century, gave rise to a generation of artists who could only have emerged and thrived in that particular world. Although officially under the rule of Philip II of Spain, in 1579 the seven northernmost provinces of the Netherlands – Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Overijssel, Gelderland, Friesland and Groningen – formed a loose federation, the Dutch Republic, and declared their independence from the Habsburg Empire. Unlike the political structure of Spain in this period, the Dutch economy was based not on social hierarchy and hereditary wealth, but on trade and industry, allowing a wealthy middle class to emerge. Its power, too, was decentralised, with the city-states operating autonomously. At the heart of its success was the trade enterprise the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie or VOC), which utilised the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean and East Indies, as well as those in North Africa, South Africa and Brazil, to lucrative effect. The trade in ivory, gold and enslaved people facilitated the rapid growth of the Dutch economy and laid the path for the pre-existing affinity for art to flourish in a new way.

The densely populated cities of 17th-century Netherlands were filled with wealthy middle-class people keen to purchase art, and this growing demand led to a boom in painters working in its cities. There were an estimated 650-750 painters working in the Netherlands in the mid-17th century, serving a population of around 1.5-2 million people, while in Renaissance Italy, for example, 9 million people were keeping just 350 painters in work. While other contemporary artists worked for patrons or on commission, it was common in the Netherlands for artists to sell their works directly to the public, at a wide range of price points. This system created an open market where artists could specialise in ways that were rare in other parts of Europe, making a name for themselves in a particular style. These specialisms are some of the most significant and unique aspects of the art of the 17th-century Dutch masters, and two of the most popular were genre paintings and still lifes.

> "ARTISTS COULD SPECIALISE, MAKING A NAME FOR THEMSELVES IN A PARTICULAR STYLE"

DRAWN FROM LIFE

Although the idea of depicting everyday scenes was not new in the 17th century, having roots as far back as, for example, Iron Age Cyprus (c.675-450 BCE), during ▶

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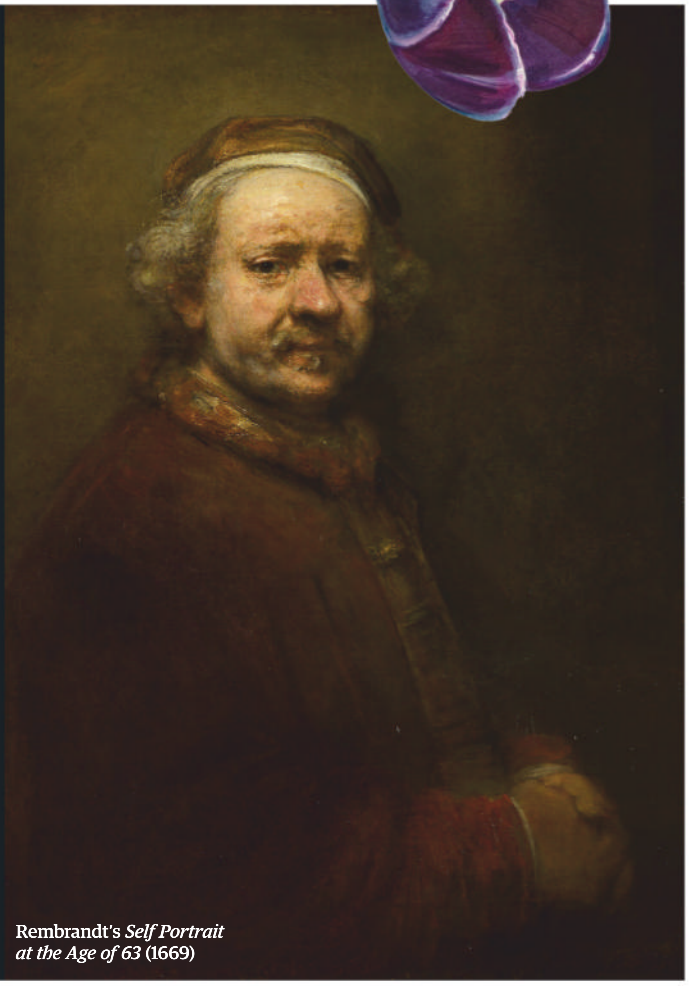
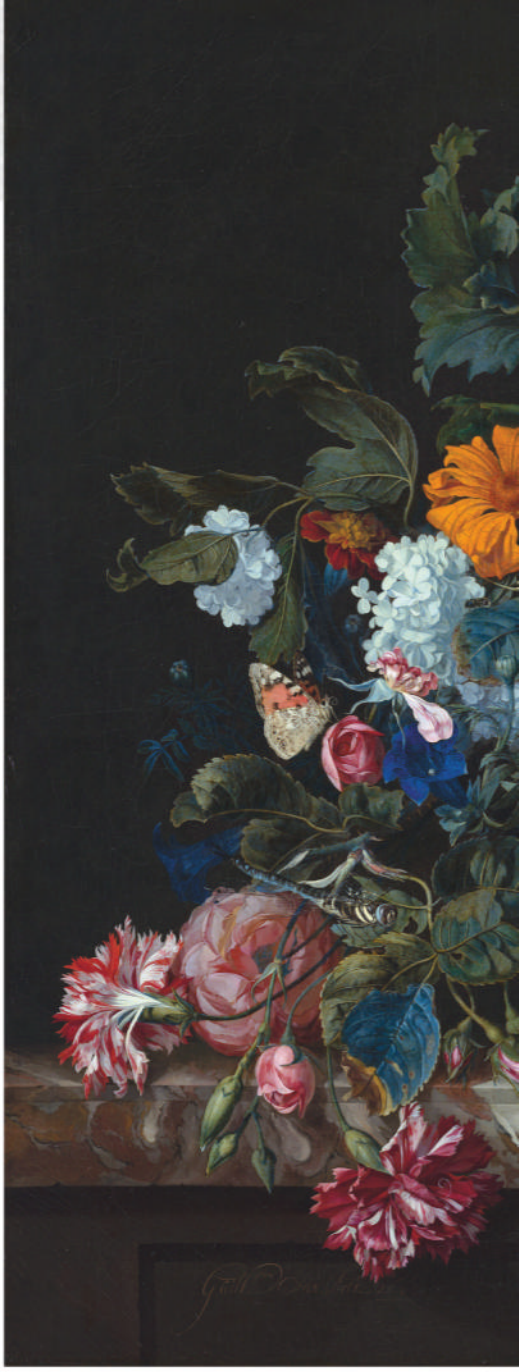
Call me Rembrandt

There are many great artists whose work is not touched on in this article, both genre artists such as Jan Steen and Maria Schalcken, as well as specialists of the still life such as Pieter Claesz and Maria Sibylla Merian. However, it would be remiss not to mention probably the most prominent of all the Dutch Golden Age painters, Rembrandt van Rijn (who dropped the 'van Rijn' in 1632 to place himself alongside the likes of Raphael and Titian). Specialising in historical scenes and portraiture, Rembrandt consistently experimented with his technique, developing a very careful use of colour and eventually a 'loose' style of painting that enabled him to create depth and direct the eye to whichever parts of the image he desired.

Far from unappreciated in his own time, Rembrandt was famous and highly regarded in the 1630s, though financial troubles and personal scandal plagued him and he was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1656 and auction off his estate. Unlike Ruysch, whose longevity led to a comfortable and productive final few years, Rembrandt never recovered from his financial issues, living off his daughter's savings for his last years and being buried in a rented grave.


Rembrandt's *Self Portrait at the Age of 63* (1669)



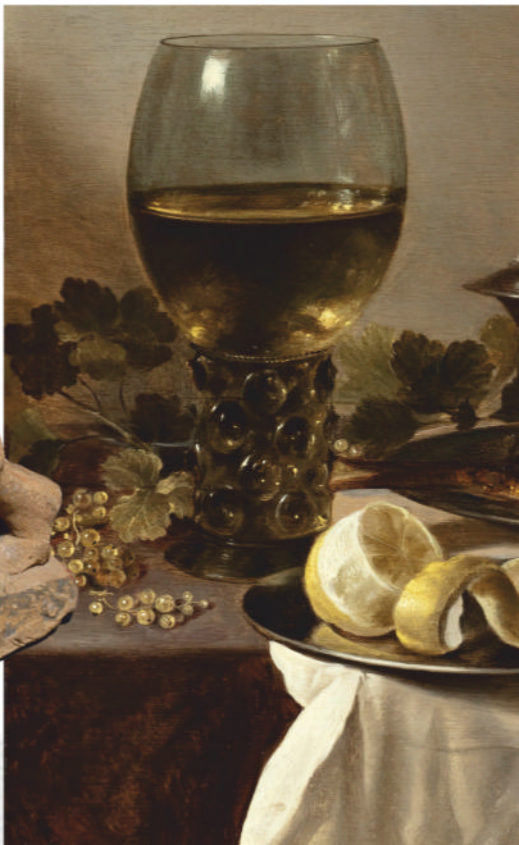
> "THERE GREW A TASTE FOR BRILLIANTLY EXECUTED PAINTINGS OF A MORE QUOTIDIAN NATURE"

the Dutch Golden Age it enjoyed a major revival. The self-made businesspeople of the Netherlands were keen to find great art that reflected their lived experience, rather than the loftier subject matter of the Italian Renaissance, where paintings often showcased religious scenes or mythological figures. There soon grew a taste for brilliantly executed paintings of a more quotidian nature, now known as 'genre paintings'.

These paintings, pioneered by the likes of Frans Hals and Judith Leyster, didn't focus on named or known figures, but instead depicted generic people such as maids, young couples, marketgoers and well-to-do middle-class men and women enjoying the fruits of their successes. Although at a basic level a genre scene can be thought of as a relatively mundane and unexciting form of artwork – as it was considered at the time by the artistic establishment throughout Europe – genre paintings not only enabled people to have art that was more intimately tied up with their actual lives, but these scenes were also fertile ground for artists to add details that were highly meaningful, often witty, sometimes boastful and occasionally rude. In Dutch society at the time, as in any culture, there were particular associations evoked by features such as professions, clothes, activities and objects, which could be played with through the use and combination of recognisable motifs.

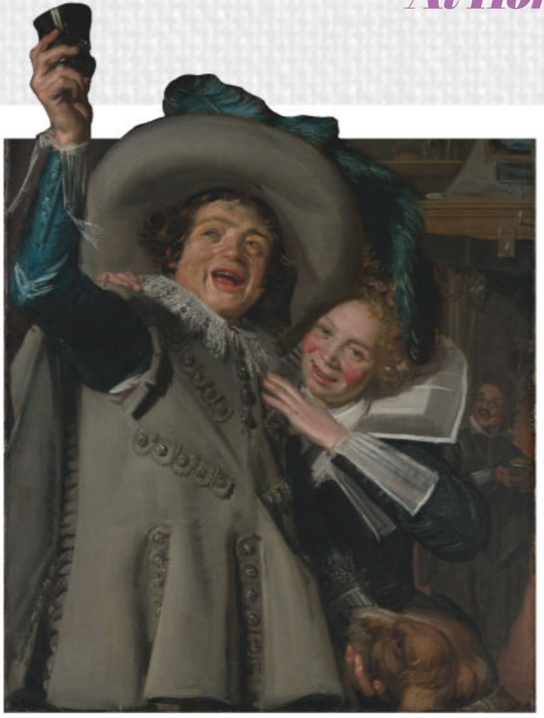
GENRE DEFINERS

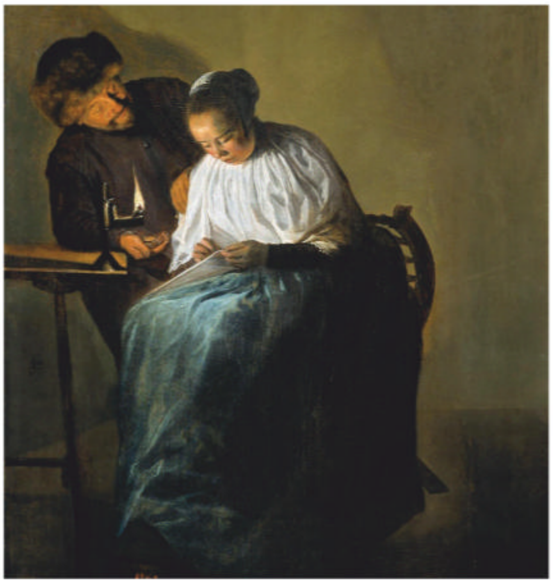
One of the most famous of the Dutch masters was Frans Hals, an artist who cut his teeth on portraiture but went on to be at the forefront of the new world of genre painting. Hals' skill in executing lively portraits



ABOVE-RIGHT A floral still life, *Flower Still Life with a Timepiece* (1663) by Willem van Aelst, who was also Rachel Ruysch's teacher

BELOW A genre scene from ancient Cyprus depicting two people baking bread

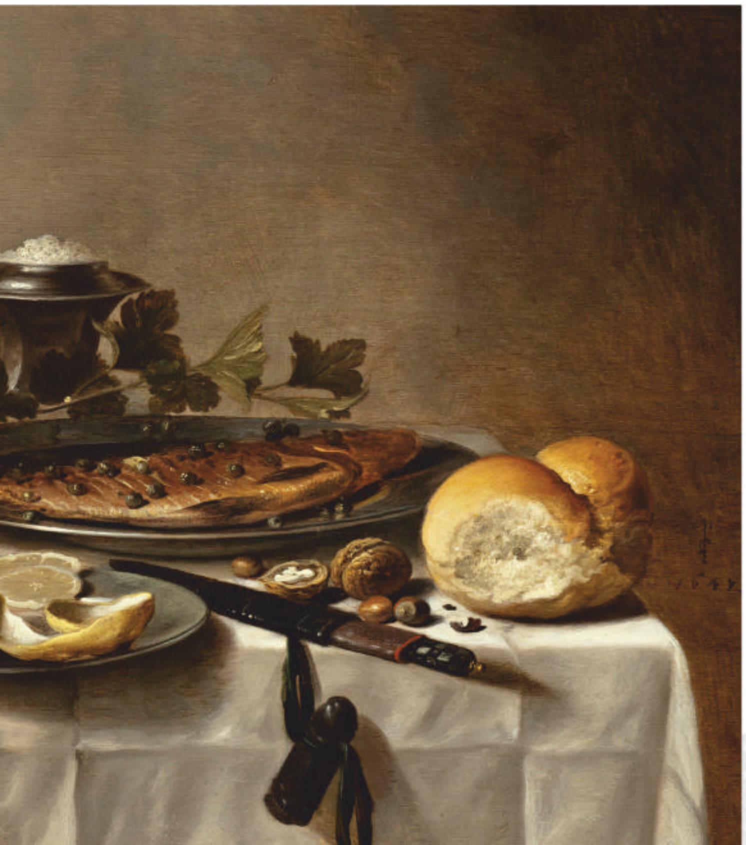




ABOVE-LEFT Frans Hals' *Young Man and Woman in an Inn* (1623)

ABOVE-RIGHT Judith Leyster's *The Proposition* (1631)

BELOW *Still Life with Herring, Wine and Bread* (1647). A banquet still life by Pieter Claesz



allowed him to evoke clear associations through his genre work. In one painting, *Young Man and Woman in an Inn*, a young couple happily cavort in the hallway of a brothel – an image of youthful folly, but one that referred to the common complaint of the older generation at the time that the youth were frivolous and didn't understand the value of hard work and self-restraint. It certainly gives a timelessness to the painting!

Another major figure, and one whose paintings have often been misattributed to Hals (it is likely she was his pupil), is Judith Leyster. Leyster was a hugely successful artist in the 1620s and 1630s, making her living from her art, joining the Guild of Saint Luke in Haarlem and taking on students – something members could only do once they had established themselves as a master. One of her trademarks was her use of light, inspired by the chiaroscuro work of Caravaggio. She was not afraid to make statements in her art and go against the norm. At the time, scenes of propositions between couples usually depicted women as being willing participants, often leading men into temptation by plying them with wine and tobacco. In Leyster's *The Proposition* (1631), however, we see a woman who is modestly dressed, somewhat uncomfortable and showing resistance to the advances of a man wanting to pay for her company.

Another influential (but not notably successful in his time) genre painter of the period is one of the Golden Age's most recognisable names: Johannes Vermeer. Perhaps best known for his tronies (page 57), he also created genre scenes, which demonstrated his mastery of light and texture and often featured women in intimate, domestic settings, whether asleep by an empty wine glass (*A Maid Asleep*) or a young woman gazing out of a window, hair covered and holding a jug, a common shorthand for purity.

STOP AND STARE

As well as active compositions of people, still lifes – detailed paintings of inanimate objects – dominated the Dutch Golden Age. This style of painting also grew out of the particular economic conditions of the region, when increasing opportunity for personal wealth and status display led to increased interest in both status objects and densely symbolic, beautiful compositions that would not only adorn a room but also communicate a wealth of propagandistic information about its owner/commissioner.

Some of the most popular still lifes were floral paintings, often combining highly prized and expensive flowers with deep symbolism and skilful execution, while other popular models included banquet still lifes, involving an array of food and drink, and, in the latter half of the 17th century, pronk displays, featuring highly prized exotic imported items such as non-native fruit, Chinese porcelain and Venetian glassware.

FLOWER ARRANGERS AND TABLE SETTERS

Rachel Ruysch, a master whose name is less familiar than some of her male counterparts, was one of the most successful still life painters of her time. The daughter ▶

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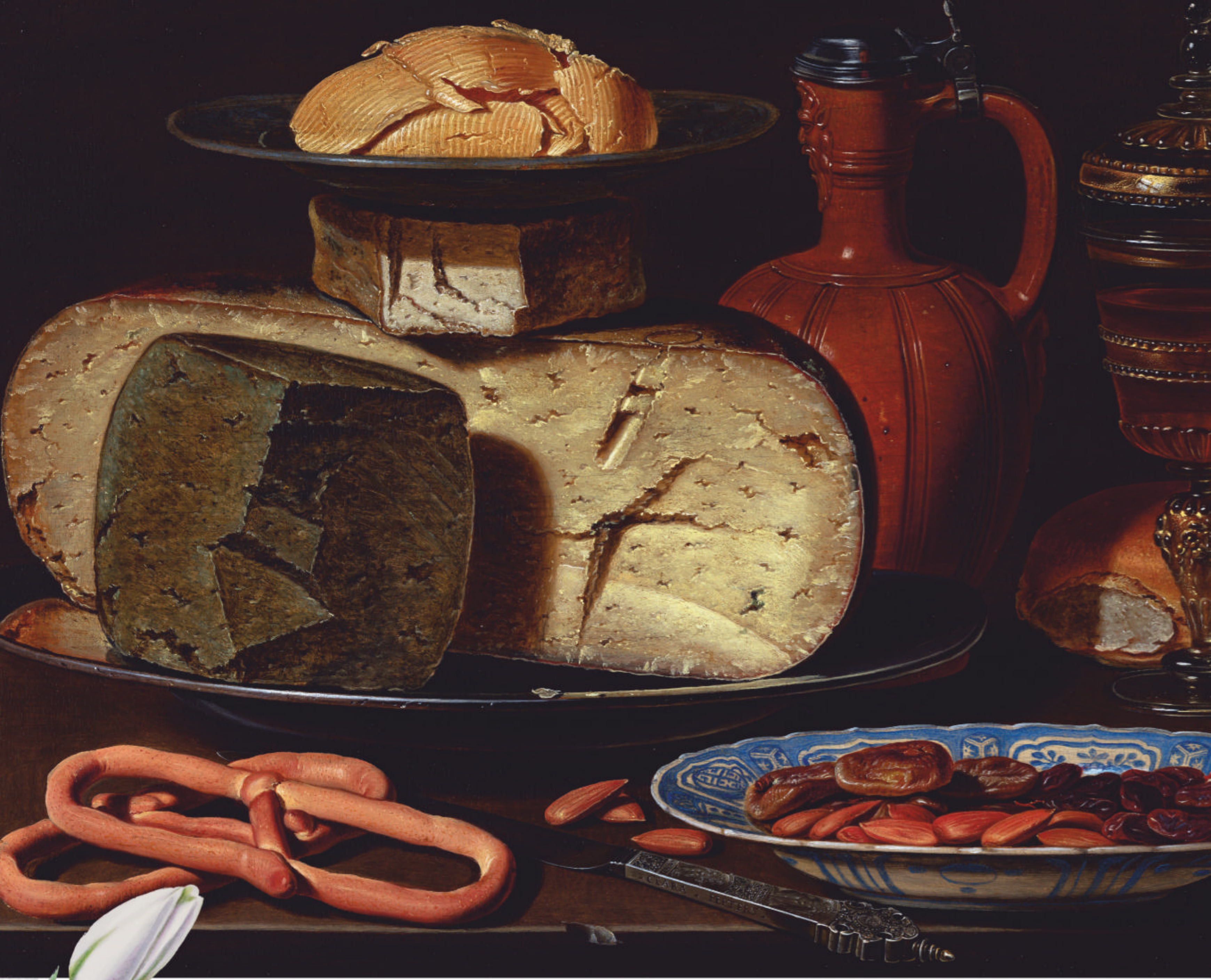
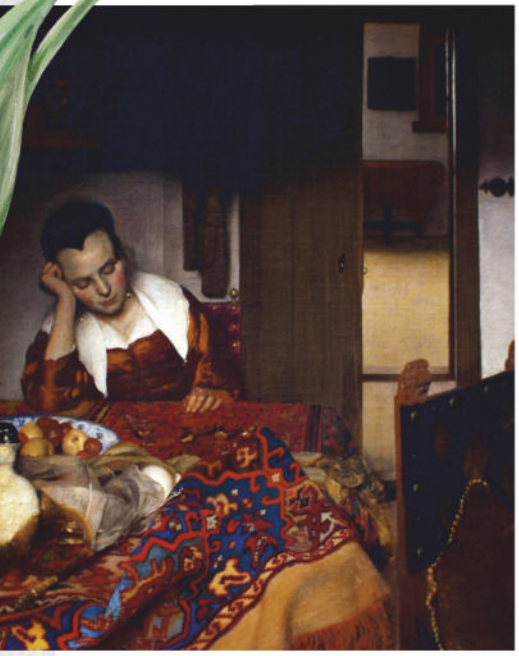




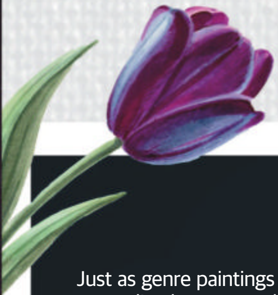
ABOVE *Still Life with Cheeses, Almonds and Pretzels* (1615), by Clara Peeters featuring a miniature self-portrait in the lid of the jug

LEFT Johannes Vermeer's *A Maid Asleep* (1656-7)

> “PEETERS WAS ABLE TO DEMONSTRATE HER UNPARALLELED ABILITY TO EVOKE DIFFERENT TEXTURES”

of an eminent botanist, her early interest in flowers is perhaps unsurprising, and at 15 she was apprenticed to the successful flower painter Willem van Aelst to hone her craft. From this point she excelled, defining her own style and achieving great repute, becoming the first female member of the Confrerie Pictura artists' society in The Hague. She also served as the court painter to Johann Wilhelm, the Elector Palatine of Bavaria, from 1708 until his death in 1716. Her reputation went from strength to strength, and she produced stunning works for an international clientele well into her ninth decade.

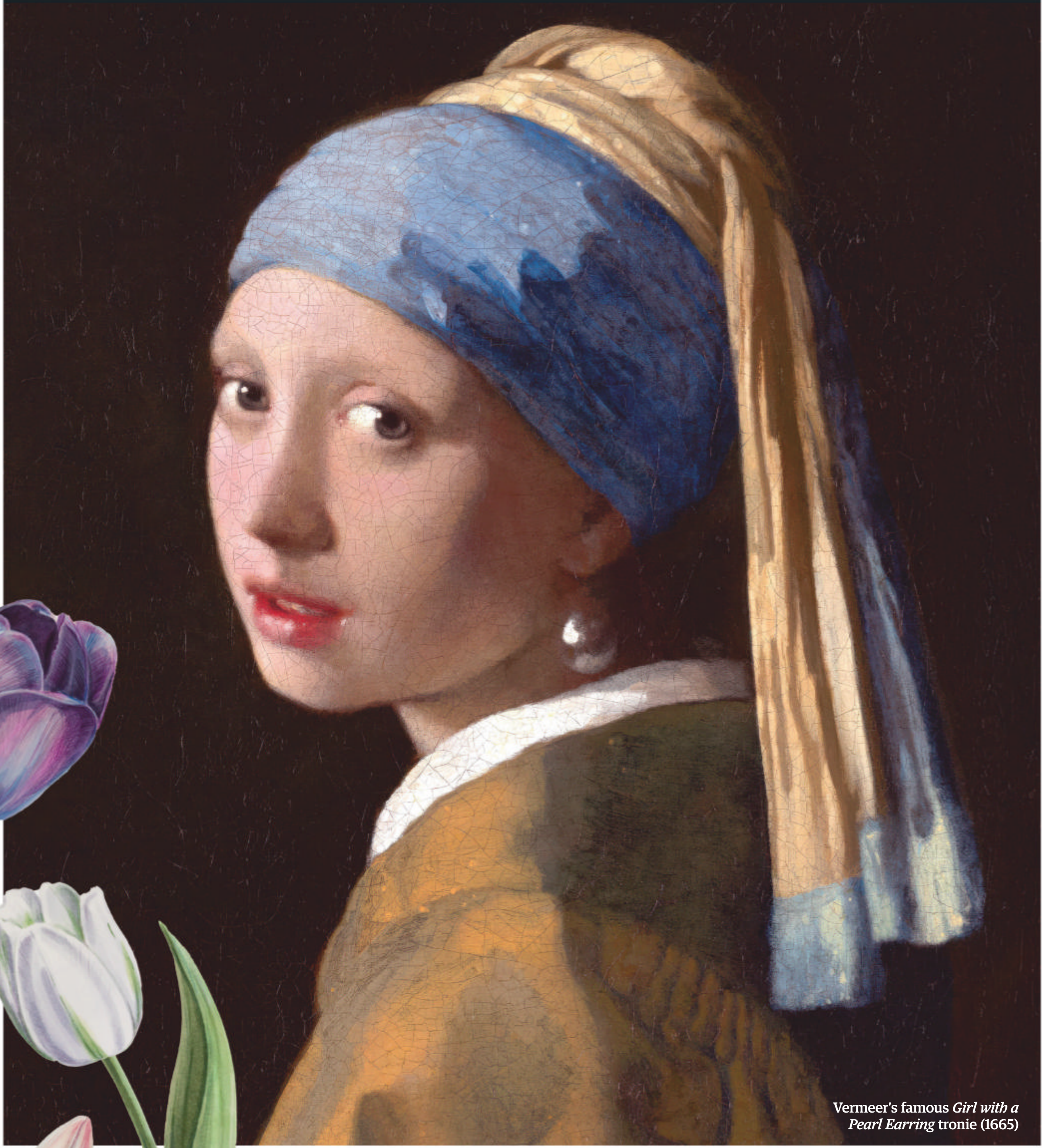
Another woman whose still lifes were both beautiful and innovative was Clara Peeters. Unfortunately little is known of her life, beyond the fact that she was one of the earliest female painters in the Netherlands to specialise in still lifes. By primarily painting banquets, where exotic objects were placed in and around food and drink, Peeters was able to demonstrate her unparalleled ability to evoke different textures. In addition to her technical skills, she was a playful painter, a trait on full display in her 1615 painting *Still Life with Cheeses, Almonds and Pretzels*. Here she not only signed her name as an engraving along the edge of a knife, but also managed to incorporate a miniature self-portrait as the reflection on the pewter lid of the earthenware jug. ○



What's in a face?

Just as genre paintings could depict generalised scenes and still lifes were not necessarily based on real spreads, Dutch portraiture was also unrestricted by reality. A peculiarly Dutch-Flemish type of artwork was the tronie, Dutch for 'face' or 'expression'. These images, which to all intents and purposes can be described as portraits, differ in that their subjects didn't exist, but were creations of their painters' imaginations. In some cases, these could be for the artists to experiment with styles, expressions and combinations that were not limited by a need to be recognisable as a particular person, or they could be studies for later works incorporating multiple people. In many cases, artists would create these as masterpieces in their own right, with Vermeer and Rembrandt being two of the most prominent tronie painters. Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, for example, is a tronie that cannot be judged as simply a study or experiment, but a true work of genius.

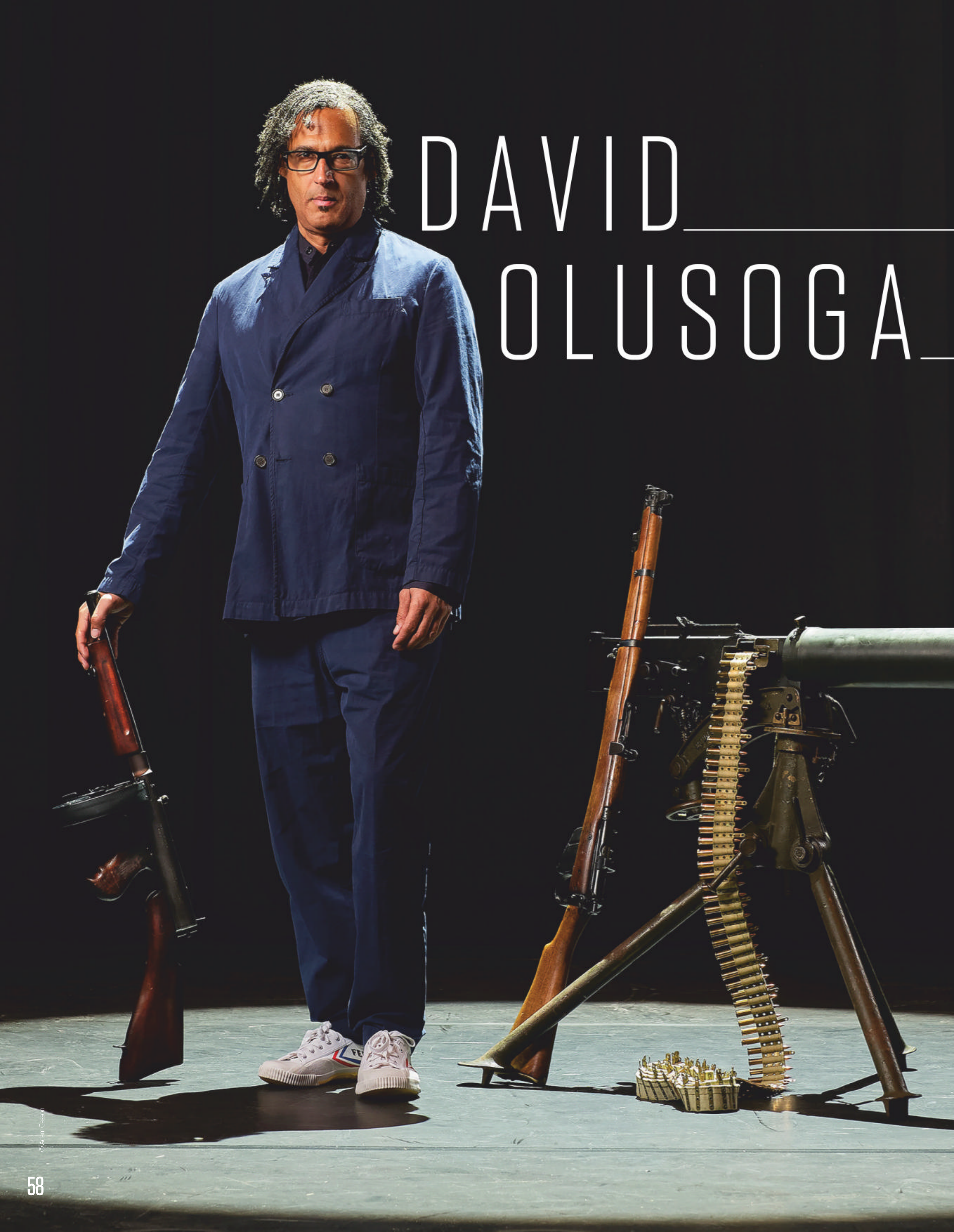
It may be that the circumstances were simply right for these types of painting to emerge, when there was much more of a focus on symbolism, genericism and artistic ability than in other places, but regardless, the tronies were a central part of the wider Dutch Golden Age of Painting.



Vermeer's famous *Girl with a Pearl Earring* tronie (1665)

All images: © Getty Images

DAVID OLUSOGA



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WAY OF THE GUN

The celebrated historian explains why he's taking to the stage with a Maxim gun on his new live tour

Interview by Jonathan Gordon

EXPERT BIO

DAVID OLUSOGA
Professor David Olusoga OBE is an award-winning British-Nigerian historian, author, presenter and film-maker. You may know him from such programmes as *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (also a book released in 2016) and *A House Through Time* (2018). He also co-hosts the podcast *Journey Through Time* with Sarah Churchwell.

Today we in Britain don't have a lot of exposure to guns. Unless we enter into the armed services, policing or have some special need for them, most people will go their entire life without touching a firearm. But we don't need to go far back – perhaps just a generation – and that was not the case. As David Olusoga OBE is exploring in his new touring show, *A Gun Through Time*, Britain's national relationship with guns is more involved and complex than you might think and, in reality, our lack of exposure to these weapons makes us outliers, not the norm.

Can you explain a little about the genesis of this tour, A Gun Through Time?

The starting point for the tour is that we, both geographically and chronologically, are unusual in that we don't have a gun culture. We don't have contact with guns. The British Army, at the end of the First World War, was four-and-a-half million strong. I look at ancestors in my family; my mother's family are from Scotland and then the north of England and it's people who worked in armaments factories in Newcastle. It's people who were in the British Army and they had contact with firearms, because the country was often at war, because guns were a bigger part of life. Really, it's been the last couple of generations who've not had any contact with firearms. We live in a society where there are very good gun safety laws, the army is historically tiny, and we don't have any form of national conscription. Unlike many other European nations, we don't come into contact with guns and because they're not part of our lives. I think we don't quite understand the extent to which they're part of our history.

One of the guns you focus on is the 'Tommy Gun'. Can you tell us a little about how it became popular, particularly in organised crime?

The Thompson gun is a great example of unintended consequences. Here is a weapon specifically designed by John Thompson for the conditions of the Western Front. It was designed to be the weapon that was going to sweep the German army out of the trenches. It was described as the 'trench broom' that was going to end the stalemate on the Western Front. However, historians can't quite work out the dates, but it seems that some prototypes were ready in 1918, but it never got there.

▶

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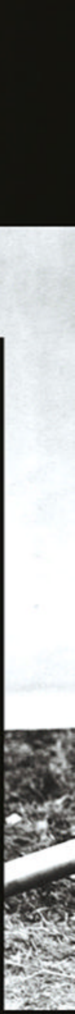


ABOVE-LEFT Women's Home Guard Auxiliaries performing a rifle drill in 1941

ABOVE-MIDDLE David Olusoga received a BAFTA Special Award in 2023 for outstanding contribution television

ABOVE-RIGHT Sir Hiram Maxim photographed with his machine gun

The war ended before this weapon could be deployed on the Western Front, so it was marketed in the 1920s as a sort of anti-bandit gun. It was sold to the American Postal Service. It was sold to a few law enforcement agencies, but most of all, it was sold to the general public and this was a gun that fell into the hands of the gangsters of the Prohibition era.

Then it's reinvented again in the Second World War. It's a proven weapon and it's bought in huge numbers by both the British and the American armies. The round magazine - the drum magazine, as it's called - that makes it look like the gun of the gangsters is replaced with a stick magazine and the gun then starts looking like the gun of the commandos. It looks like the gun of the American army in the Pacific War. It's a gun created for one war that burst onto the streets as the 'Chicago typewriter', the weapon of the of the gangsters and Al Capone, that then has another life as one of the key weapons of the Second World War.

What role did Hollywood have to play in this?

Its use in cinema is fascinating, because then it was the gangsters' gun. Two Thompsons were used in the 1929 St Valentine's Day Massacre. It was a gun associated with John Dillinger, with Baby Face Nelson and with Pretty Boy Floyd. It was the weapon of the roaring 20s, but it was also the weapon of the great days of Hollywood.

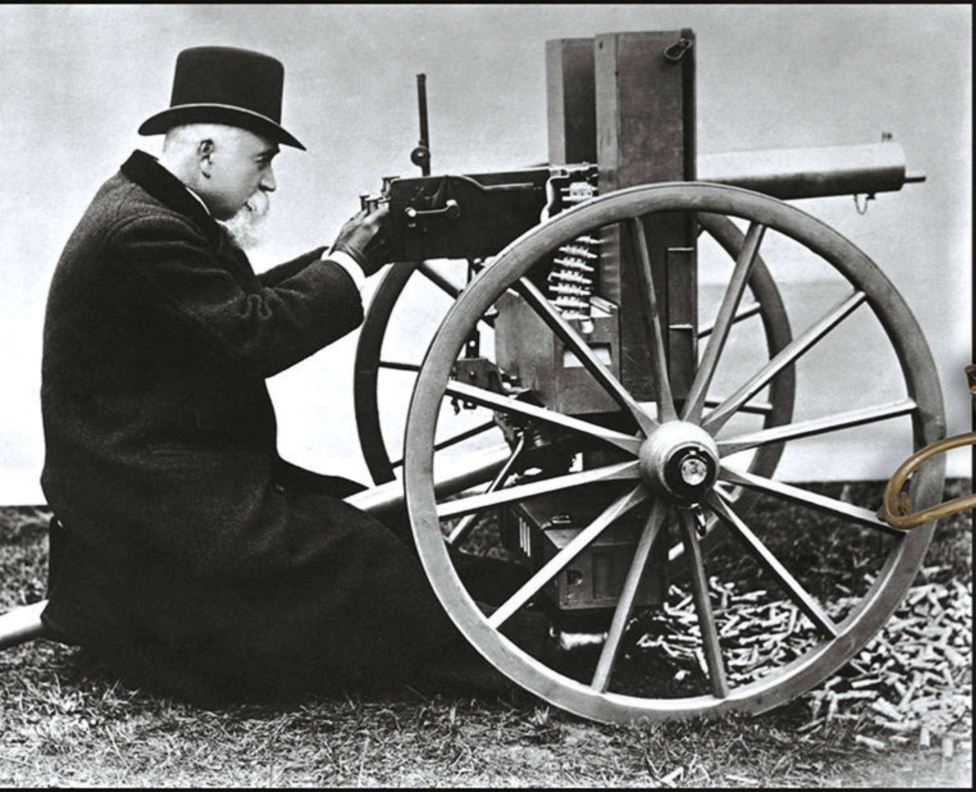
The Hays Codes - the codes that controlled what could or could not be shown in films produced in the United States in the 1930s - stipulated that the Thompson machine gun could only be shown in the hands of law enforcement and it could no longer be shown in the hands of gangsters. How much it's linked to that idea of the gangsters is best shown in the story of the photograph that was taken of Winston Churchill in a pinstripe suit with a cigar and a Homburg hat, holding a Thompson gun with a drum magazine. That image was seized upon by the Nazis as a propaganda image because they were trying to portray Churchill as a warmonger and a gangster. It was an image that the British loved because they quite liked the idea of their leader being as ruthless and as glamorous as Hollywood had portrayed the gangsters!

To what degree did the Maxim gun become symbolic of the imperial brutality of expansion of European powers before its use in the Great War?

I don't think it did become symbolic of colonial brutality, because I think that brutality was far away. It wasn't presented as brutality. It was presented as the inevitable sweeping away of primitive people by a higher race and a higher technology. And I think one of the reasons why the Maxim gun was such a shock to Europeans, particularly the British on the Western Front from late 1914 onwards, was because this was a weapon so associated with wars against so-called primitive people. The way that it had transformed the world was not immediately apparent. It was understood as a technology only really of use for these small colonial wars against people with primitive rifles or even spears, because it was seen as a colonial tool, rather than a piece of technology that had already changed the world in a way that Europeans hadn't fully understood. I think in our imagination it is more strongly associated with the Western Front than it is with the colonial period, but really the conquest of Africa. The Maxim gun is invented in 1884 and the scramble for Africa, the transfer of control of Africa, begins in the same decade. The Maxim gun is invented in the same year as the 1884 Berlin conference. So, as Europeans gather in Bismarck's villa in Berlin to carve out their spheres of influence, which lands they could attempt to seize hold of as colonies, the weapon that is going to allow them to do so has just been invented in London.

Can you tell us a little about the importance of the Lee- Enfield rifle and its place in British life?

The tour isn't really about the technology of these weapons; it's about the social history of these weapons and this is a gun where over 17 million were produced. It was a weapon that



> “THE MAXIM GUN IS INVENTED IN 1884 AND THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA BEGINS IN THE SAME DECADE”

was in the hands of our ancestors, from 1895 to 1957. It's there in the wars of the late Victorian period and it's in the hands of British soldiers who go to Suez in the Cold War. That's an astonishing sweep of history.

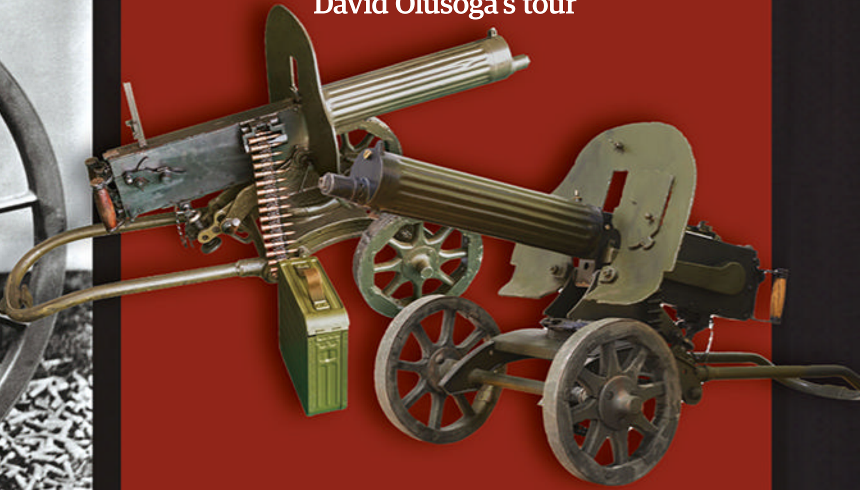
I think it's a weapon that reinforces the point, which I really want to make, which is that we are historically aberrant in that we don't touch guns [in the UK]. The United States has more guns than people. This tour wouldn't work in America because the audience will be more heavily armed than me on stage, because they are familiar with guns. But our ancestors, my grandfather's generation and my great grandfather's generation, were equally familiar with guns. What I'm really interested in is the social history of this weapon that everybody, a huge number of people, understood that it was a symbol that they recognised. The profile of the Lee-Enfield was something that millions of people in Britain, men and women, recognised as the British gun, the weapon that the British Army controlled the empire with, that fought wars with and it was part of everyone's culture.

The other point is that an unfamiliarity with firearms is not only an historical aberration, it's a privilege, and it's a privilege I'm not sure is going to be extended to our children. Obviously, guns are not the only form of technology. War is becoming far more high tech, and there's an awful lot of talk of soldiers as technicians using technology rather than firing guns. But I do wonder if this period where we don't, as a people, know very much about firearms, whether that might come to an end. I think if you ask most British people today, what is the standard rifle of the British Army, they couldn't tell you. I think if you ask most people, 'what is the SA 80?', they wouldn't know.

▶

IN THE CROSSHAIRS

The guns that are the focus of David Olusoga's tour



MAXIM MACHINE GUN 1884

A weapon heavily associated with the First World War, the Maxim gun was invented by Hiram Maxim, an American who worked in England. It was manufactured by Vickers, an engineering company founded in Sheffield in 1828, which was in operation until 1999. Most remarkably, the Maxim machine gun remains a weapon of war to this day.

LEE-ENFIELD RIFLE 1895

The weapon of British forces in two world wars, the Lee-Enfield was probably the gun Brits in the early 20th century had the most first-hand experience with. It was a little shorter than older rifles and as such was less accurate at longer range, but had a faster rate of fire. The weapon had a reputation for being reliable.

THOMPSON SUBMACHINE GUN 1920

The infamous 'Tommy' gun has a more complex past than you might think. Designed by American John T Thompson, it was intended as a 'trench sweeper' for WWI, but was developed too late for that war. Its rapid fire rate and large barrel magazines saw it adopted in the Prohibition era by organised crime, but the US Army also took it on from 1928.

All images: © Getty Images, © Shutterstock

“I THINK OUR PASSION AS A NATION FOR HISTORY HAS NEVER BEEN GREATER”

But it sounds like you don't need to go too far back in anyone's family to find someone who either held or faced these weapons?

I think so. And, as I said, on my mother's side there are soldiers who carried earlier generations of weapons. But I think it's different for Africans, because in 1884 the decision is made to carve Africa up, and in the same year there is the weapon that is going to make it possible. So there is a very, very direct link, that I think is uniquely African, between a piece of military technology and where the borders, what language you speak, which capital city you go to, and, if you can, what university you go to. Nigeria speaks English, in part because of the Maxim gun. Cameroon speaks French because of the machine gun. The machine gun made this possible.

Could you tell us a little about why you're doing this show as an in-person tour rather than as a TV show or podcast or something else?

The point of the tour, from my point of view, is that I think that this is an amazing time to be involved in history and to be an historian because I think our passion as a nation for history has never been greater. And people want to come out, and they want to hear historians speak. But I deliver history in lots of different ways. I do a podcast, I write books, I write articles, I make television programmes and I give lots of lectures, and what I wanted to do was to find a way of doing something that's a hybrid, taking some of the presenting styles that I do on television and putting them on stage. Something that is in between a public lecture and the sort of presenting of history, using objects, using film, using photographs that I do on television. So this is much closer to a show than it is to a talk. That's the idea, and hence having the objects on stage. But I think the other thing is we don't, as I've said, come into contact with guns. I mean, the Maxim gun is a shocking thing to see. They are disturbing objects, but they're also alluring objects, whether we like that or not, whether that should be the case or not.

Is there anything that particularly jumped out to you about this topic as you put the show together?

The thing that strikes me, which hasn't really come out of research for this tour, but I really want it to land on stage, is the strange history of the Maxim gun. It's got the strangest history of any weapon ever created. The strangest thing about the Maxim gun is that right now, a weapon invented in 1884 is on the battlefields in Ukraine. It's being used to hold positions in what is now trench warfare. Parts of the frontlines look horribly, terrifyingly, like the Western Front. And it's being used – I think most bizarrely – to shoot down drones. So the most high-tech piece of modern military equipment is being attempted to be countered with, literally, a Victorian weapon.

What do you hope people will take away from the A Gun Through Time tour?

I'm hoping that what seems like maybe an odd subject for me to do, I hope people will understand why I think it's important to recognise that these objects have histories that we're not always aware of. That objects, inventions, technologies, even terrible technologies like the Maxim gun and the Thompson gun have changed the world and left their imprint on the world. A prop on stage can be the key to unlocking a social history. This is not military history. It's not technological history. It's a history of the people who used those guns and who faced those guns. ○

ABOVE-LEFT Its use in the St Valentine's Day Massacre in 1929 forever connected the 'Tommy' gun to organised crime

ABOVE-RIGHT The image of Winston Churchill with the 'Tommy' gun was popular at home, but a propaganda tool for the Nazis

BELOW-LEFT The Lee-Enfield rifles were adopted by the British Armed Forces in 1897 and was in use until 1957

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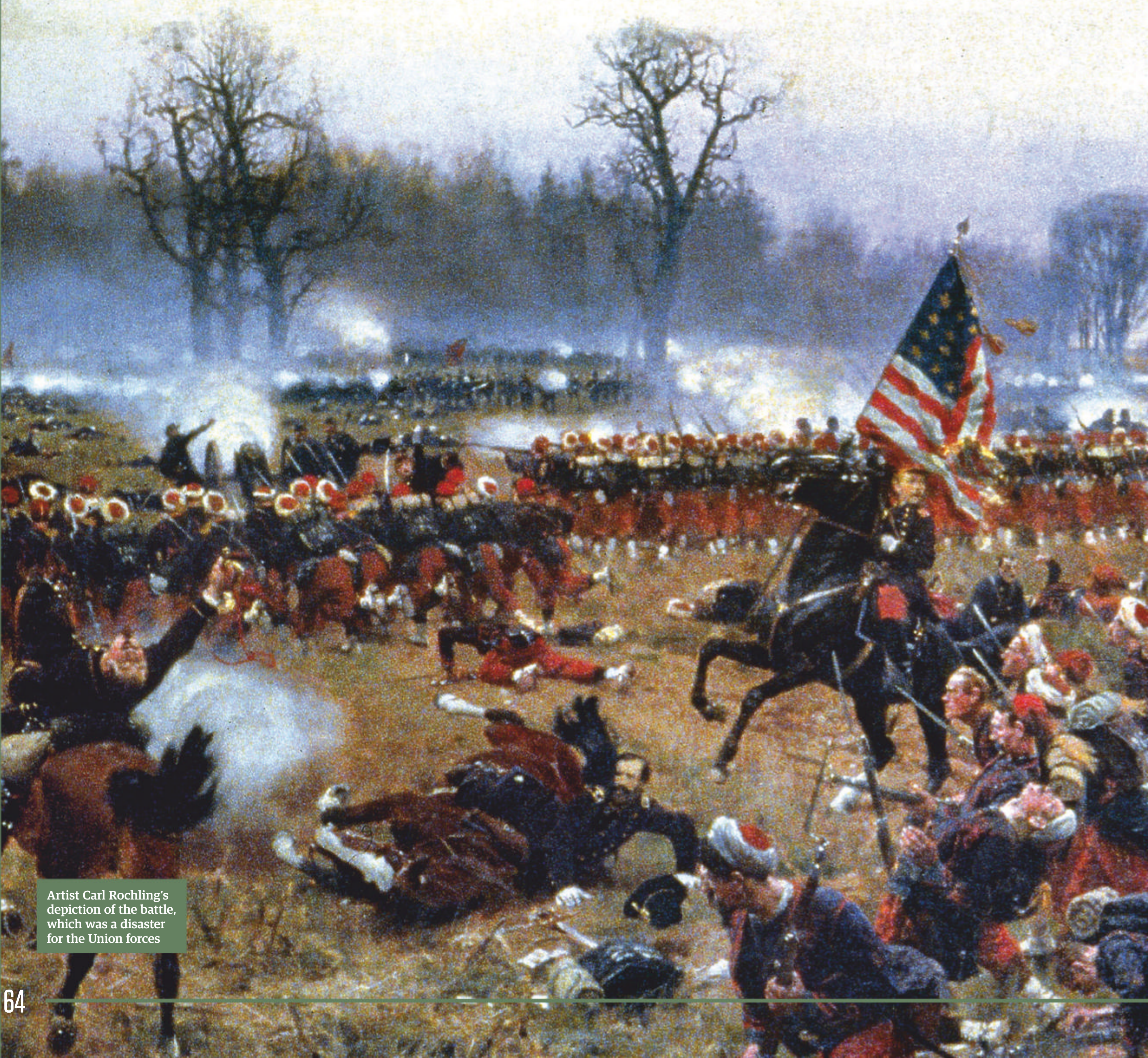
FREDERICKSBURG

FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA, USA
11-15 DECEMBER 1862

Written by Iain MacGregor



Artist Carl Rochling's depiction of the battle, which was a disaster for the Union forces

By early November 1862, anxious that his administration was rapidly losing public support in the north, an impatient President Abraham Lincoln had grown weary of the Army of the Potomac's popular commander – Major General George B McClellan – and installed his subordinate and close friend Major General Ambrose Burnside as his reluctant successor. Though a capable corps-level commander, Burnside himself admitted he was not capable of commanding an army in the field. The daunting figure of General Robert E Lee and his victorious Army of Northern Virginia only added to his lack of confidence. Yet Burnside was damned if he would step aside to allow his fellow corps commander, and political intriguer, Brigadier General Joe Hooker, to be given the promotion instead. Against his better judgement, Burnside acquiesced to Lincoln's request.

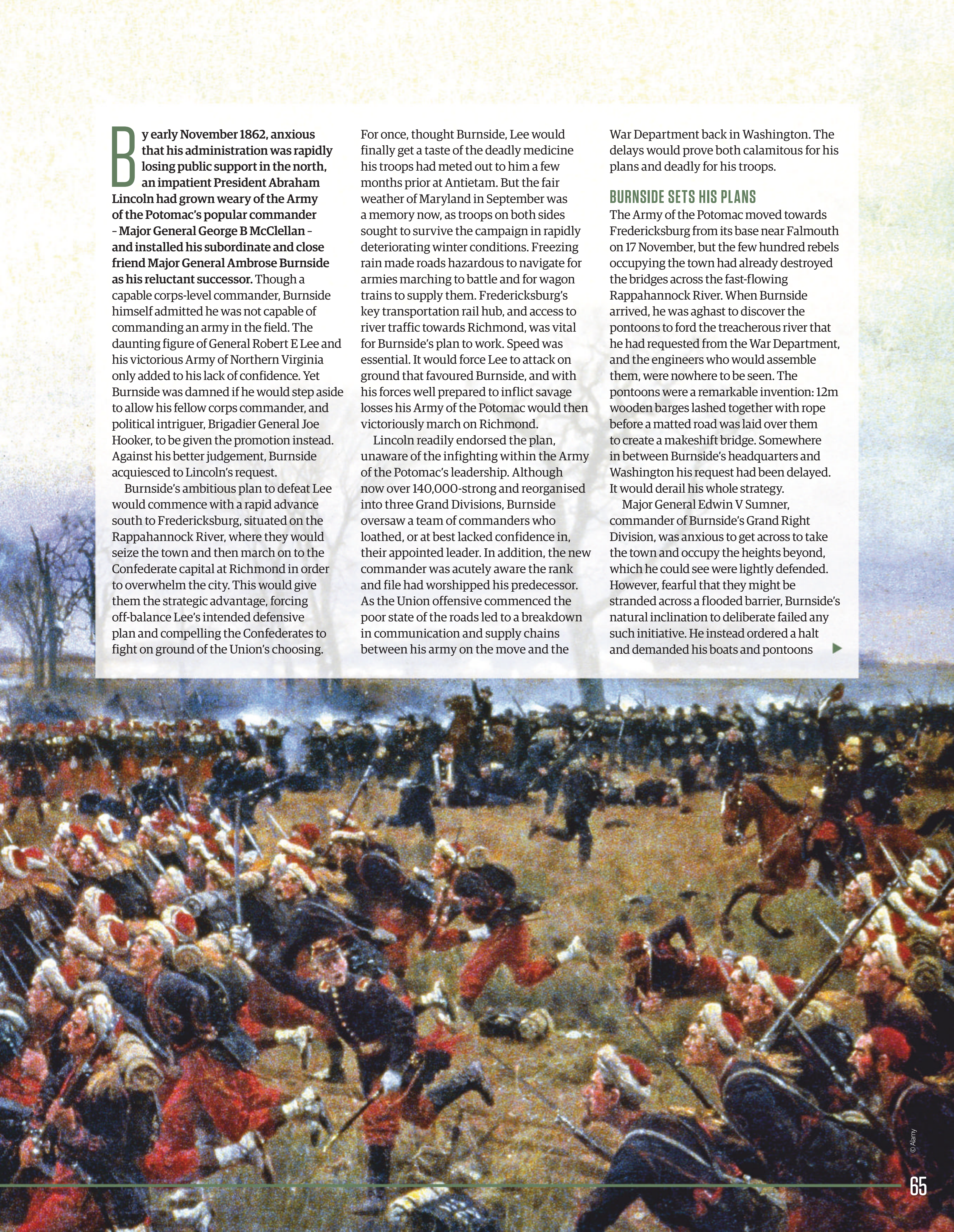
Burnside's ambitious plan to defeat Lee would commence with a rapid advance south to Fredericksburg, situated on the Rappahannock River, where they would seize the town and then march on to the Confederate capital at Richmond in order to overwhelm the city. This would give them the strategic advantage, forcing off-balance Lee's intended defensive plan and compelling the Confederates to fight on ground of the Union's choosing. For once, thought Burnside, Lee would finally get a taste of the deadly medicine his troops had meted out to him a few months prior at Antietam. But the fair weather of Maryland in September was a memory now, as troops on both sides sought to survive the campaign in rapidly deteriorating winter conditions. Freezing rain made roads hazardous to navigate for armies marching to battle and for wagon trains to supply them. Fredericksburg's key transportation rail hub, and access to river traffic towards Richmond, was vital for Burnside's plan to work. Speed was essential. It would force Lee to attack on ground that favoured Burnside, and with his forces well prepared to inflict savage losses his Army of the Potomac would then victoriously march on Richmond.

Lincoln readily endorsed the plan, unaware of the infighting within the Army of the Potomac's leadership. Although now over 140,000-strong and reorganised into three Grand Divisions, Burnside oversaw a team of commanders who loathed, or at best lacked confidence in, their appointed leader. In addition, the new commander was acutely aware the rank and file had worshipped his predecessor. As the Union offensive commenced the poor state of the roads led to a breakdown in communication and supply chains between his army on the move and the War Department back in Washington. The delays would prove both calamitous for his plans and deadly for his troops.

BURNSIDE SETS HIS PLANS

The Army of the Potomac moved towards Fredericksburg from its base near Falmouth on 17 November, but the few hundred rebels occupying the town had already destroyed the bridges across the fast-flowing Rappahannock River. When Burnside arrived, he was aghast to discover the pontoons to ford the treacherous river that he had requested from the War Department, and the engineers who would assemble them, were nowhere to be seen. The pontoons were a remarkable invention: 12m wooden barges lashed together with rope before a matted road was laid over them to create a makeshift bridge. Somewhere in between Burnside's headquarters and Washington his request had been delayed. It would derail his whole strategy.

Major General Edwin V Sumner, commander of Burnside's Grand Right Division, was anxious to get across to take the town and occupy the heights beyond, which he could see were lightly defended. However, fearful that they might be stranded across a flooded barrier, Burnside's natural inclination to deliberate failed any such initiative. He instead ordered a halt and demanded his boats and pontoons ▶



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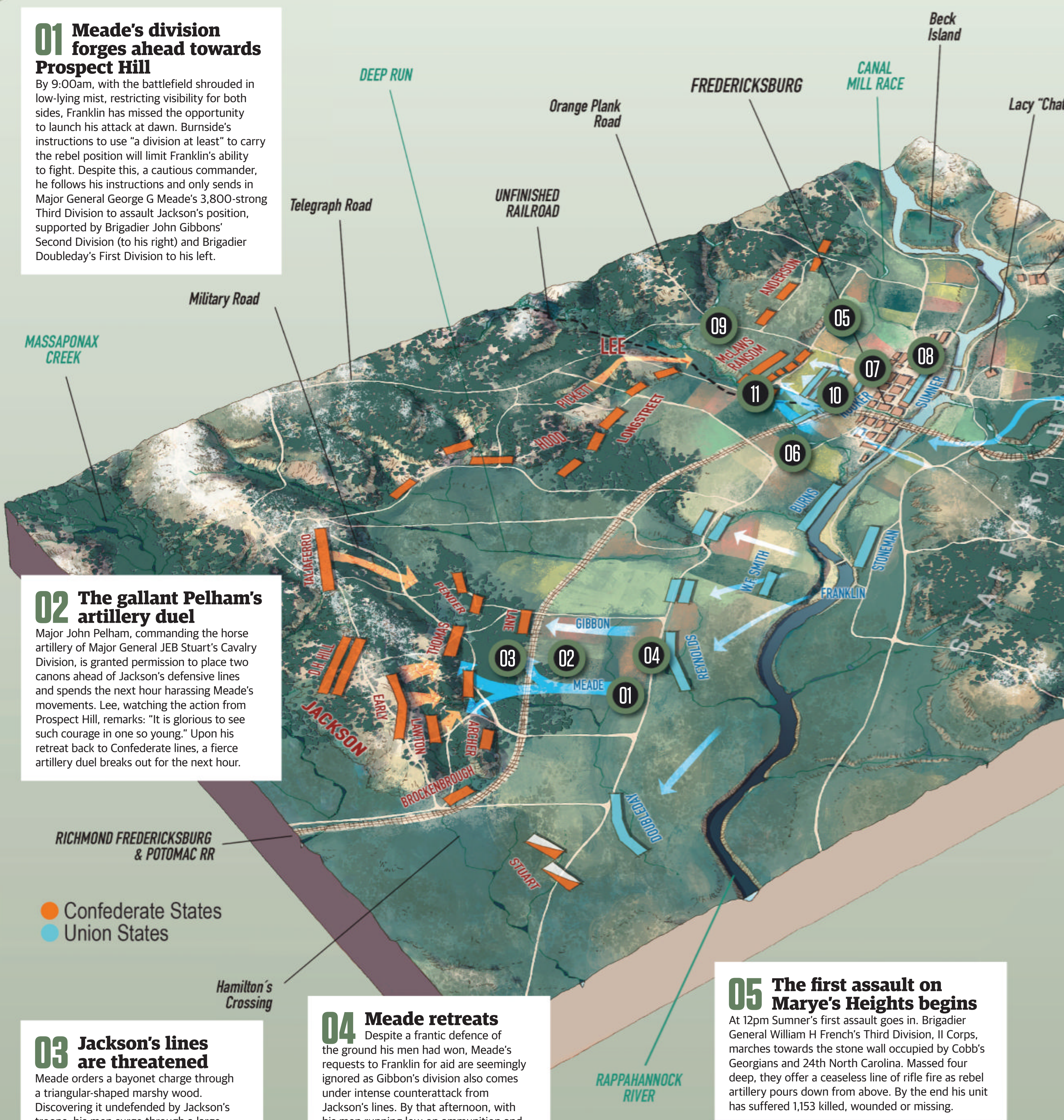
01 Meade's division forges ahead towards Prospect Hill

By 9:00am, with the battlefield shrouded in low-lying mist, restricting visibility for both sides, Franklin has missed the opportunity to launch his attack at dawn. Burnside's instructions to use "a division at least" to carry the rebel position will limit Franklin's ability to fight. Despite this, a cautious commander, he follows his instructions and only sends in Major General George G Meade's 3,800-strong Third Division to assault Jackson's position, supported by Brigadier John Gibbons' Second Division (to his right) and Brigadier Doubleday's First Division to his left.

02 The gallant Pelham's artillery duel

Major John Pelham, commanding the horse artillery of Major General JEB Stuart's Cavalry Division, is granted permission to place two canons ahead of Jackson's defensive lines and spends the next hour harassing Meade's movements. Lee, watching the action from Prospect Hill, remarks: "It is glorious to see such courage in one so young." Upon his retreat back to Confederate lines, a fierce artillery duel breaks out for the next hour.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JACKSON
EARLY
LAWTON
ARCHER
BROCKENBROUGH
DOUBLEDAY
STUART
RICHMOND FREDERICKSBURG & POTOMAC RR
● Confederate States
● Union States
Hamilton's Crossing
RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER

03 Jackson's lines are threatened

Meade orders a bayonet charge through a triangular-shaped marshy wood. Discovering it undefended by Jackson's troops, his men surge through a large gap, catching resting Confederates commanded by Brigadier Maxcy Gregg by surprise. Gregg is mortally wounded as he tries to rally his retreating men. The Pennsylvanians surge through the wood and deep into Jackson's interior before he brings up significant reinforcements to engage in hand-to-hand fighting.

04 Meade retreats

Despite a frantic defence of the ground his men had won, Meade's requests to Franklin for aid are seemingly ignored as Gibbon's division also comes under intense counterattack from Jackson's lines. By that afternoon, with his men running low on ammunition and with increasing Southern attacks on all sides, Meade orders a fighting retreat towards Franklin's main positions a mile away. Over 20,000 fresh troops remain by their bridgehead as Franklin seeks to ensure its safety. Meade's unit suffers over 40 percent casualties: 179 killed, 1,082 wounded and 509 missing.

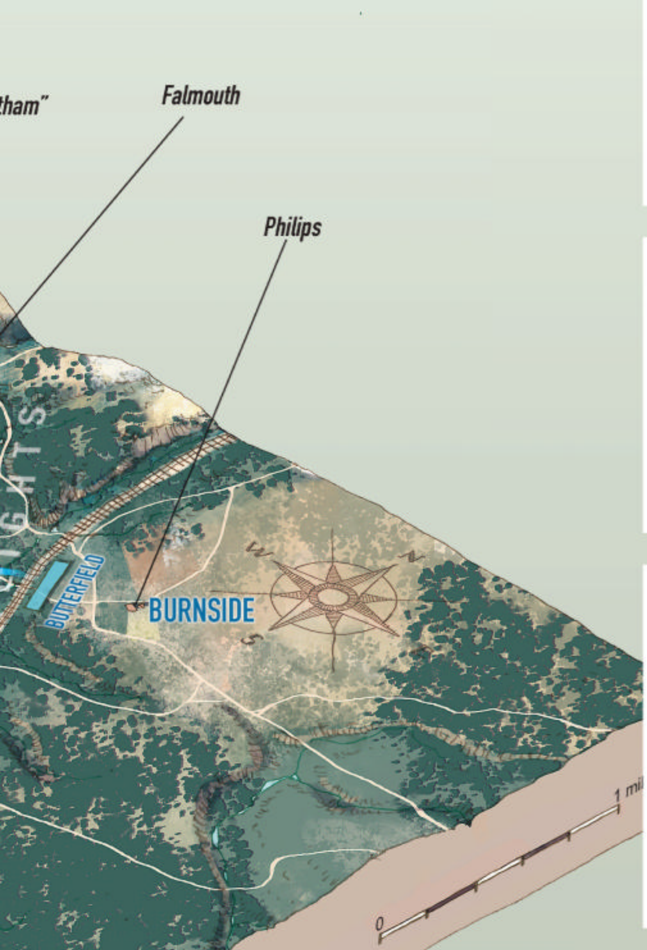
05 The first assault on Marye's Heights begins

At 12pm Sumner's first assault goes in. Brigadier General William H French's Third Division, II Corps, marches towards the stone wall occupied by Cobb's Georgians and 24th North Carolina. Massed four deep, they offer a ceaseless line of rifle fire as rebel artillery pours down from above. By the end his unit has suffered 1,153 killed, wounded or missing.

06 The second wave attacks

At 1pm, Brigadier General Hancock's division is ordered into action. Colonel Zook's brigade leading the first charge, the survivors managing to get within 25 paces of the wall before falling back with heavy losses.

Map illustration: Rocío Espín Piñar



07 The 'Fighting Irish'

From within Hancock's division, General Meagher's Irish Brigade, comprising of men from the 116th Pennsylvania, 28th Massachusetts, 63rd, 69th and 88th New York storm forward into another hail of shrapnel and bullets. Many of Cobb's Georgia Brigade are of Irish descent, but they still offer a hot reception to their brethren. Of the 1,200 men Meagher takes into battle, 545 are killed, wounded or missing. Overall, Hancock's division has suffered 2,032 casualties.

08 The third assault

At 2pm, Sumner tries something different. He orders two different units to attack the stone wall at the same time from different directions. Oliver O Howard's brigades are next in line for the assault, where they originally intend to sweep around to attack the Confederate left. But with Hancock's division destroyed, Howard's men instead quick-time over the field of casualties towards the centre, with the support of Brigadier Samuel Sturgis' division. Again, it is met with devastating firepower from behind the stone wall. Not one Union man gets to within 20 paces before falling.

09 A pause in the fighting

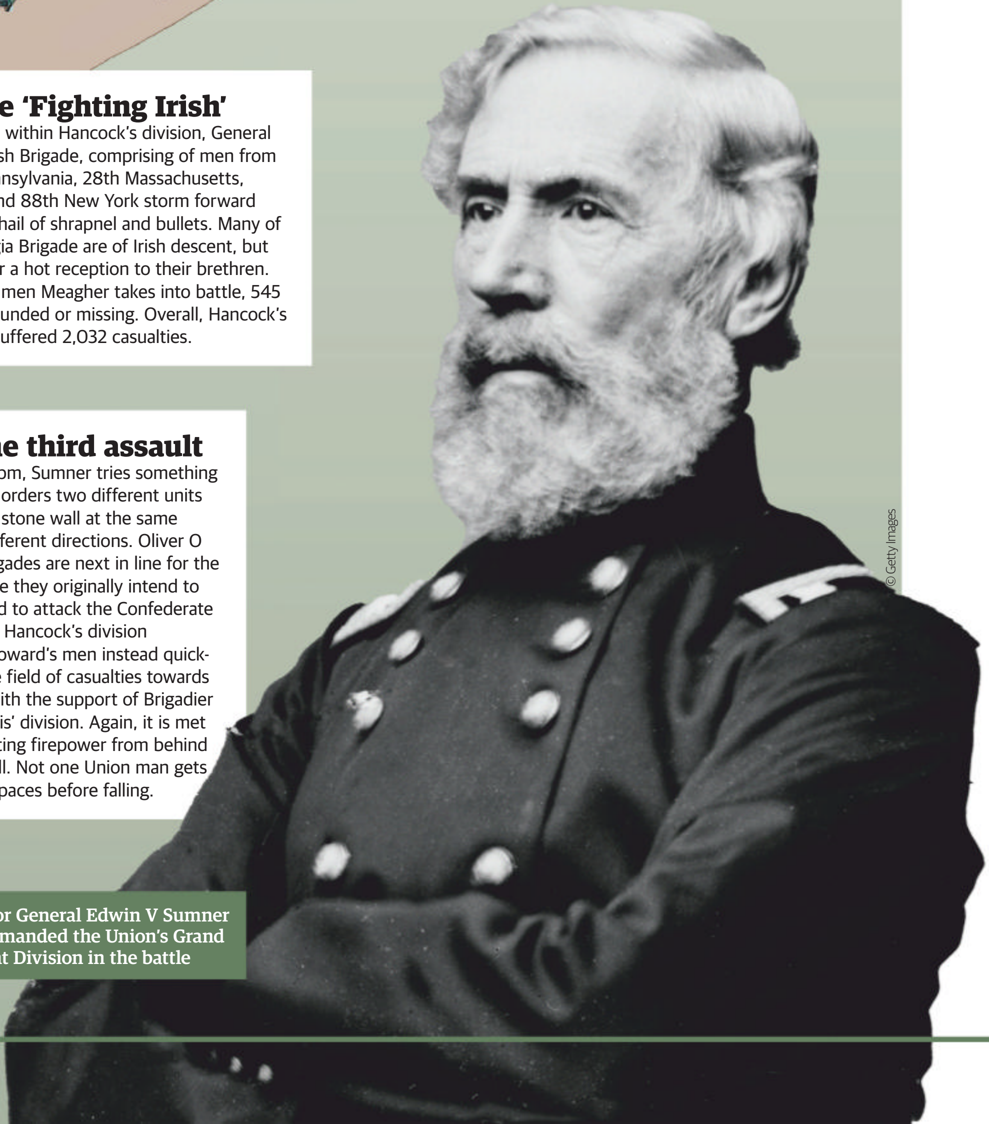
So far, Burnside's plan is failing. He has lost over 5,000 men before the wall. While both sides take stock of the situation, Longstreet reinforces the Georgians at the wall with more ammunition. Hooker makes his way to Burnside's headquarters to demand an end to the assault on Marye's Heights. He is ignored.

10 The fourth assault

At 3pm, Brigadier General Charles Griffin's division goes in straight towards the stone wall, marching in ranks through the field of dead and dying comrades. Again, it is repulsed as concentrated Confederate rifle fire and massed artillery rounds crash in from their front and from the flanks. French's men, if one can say they are fortunate, only suffer 66 killed and 752 wounded. Still the assaults continue as dusk begins to settle.

11 The final assault

At 5pm, Brigadier General Andrew A Humphreys on horseback personally leads his Third Division from V Corps as it advances up Marye's Heights. By now, the approach to the battlefield is clogged with hundreds of Union stragglers and the walking wounded. Humphreys' unit has to navigate past them before falling into line before the final assault. Five of his seven staff officers are killed or wounded alongside him, two horses fall beneath him, and enemy bullets tear holes in his uniform. Somehow he survives. Over 1,000 of his men who follow him into battle do not.


Major General Edwin V Sumner commanded the Union's Grand Right Division in the battle

© Getty Images

be made ready as soon as possible. A few days dragged to two weeks, and by the end of the month the element of surprise had evaporated. Lee had rushed up two corps totalling 79,000 men, commanded by Generals James Longstreet and Thomas 'Stonewall' Jackson.

Burnside's army could only watch as the enemy across the river now constructed an 11km-long series of defensive works in the hills behind Fredericksburg, ready and well positioned to await an expected Union assault. Lee himself was sure no Union commander would be foolish enough to attempt such a move. Recording in his personal diary of his growing frustration at how badly the outcome now looked for the Union forces, Colonel Samuel K Zook, commander of the 57th New York Infantry, knew the fate that now awaited his men:

"If we had had the pontoons promised when we arrived here, we could have had the hills on the other side of the river without the cost of 50 men. Now it will cost at least 10,000, if not more!"

He was right to be fearful. The Confederates had established formidable lines of defences above and below the city, as well as the commanding Marye's Heights 550m to the west of the town, where Lee's troops and artillery had an excellent field of fire. Should the enemy get across a canal and into the main field to then attack the position they would be sitting ducks for a fusillade of rifle and cannon. Lee's commanders were confident in their defences, internal lines of supply and communication. Any breaks in their lines could be reinforced quickly. Even if Burnside did intend carrying the ridge of Marye's Heights, they would first need to take positions protected by a 1.2m-high stone wall a few hundred metres in front, which lined an old sunken farm road. Behind this natural barrier, four lines of infantry belonging to Brigadier General Thomas R Cobb's Georgian Division would lie in wait for any massed Union attack.

As both sides watched one another across the Rappahannock, whereas Lee was content to sit and wait for the next move by the Army of the Potomac, Burnside was inundated with pressure from Washington to move to take the Confederate position. On 12 December, while Confederate sharpshooters hiding in the town tried to pick off Union engineers constructing the pontoon bridges, Burnside ordered a lengthy artillery bombardment to suppress them. It would be the largest artillery bombardment of the war so far. From Stafford Heights where Burnside's headquarters were situated, overlooking the river from the Union

▶

positions, 150 artillery pieces fired over 8,000 projectiles into the town. After the barrage, remarkably, Confederate troops still continued to fire upon Union bridge builders from amid the ruins.

Burnside called for volunteers to undertake the very first amphibious infantry assault of the war, to clear the town. Union troops established a bridgehead and slowly pushed back the Confederates through its streets, despite never being trained for urban combat. By 4:30pm Lee's pickets had retired back to the heights as Union massed columns started crossing for the main attack the next day. In the lull, many Union troops looted and vandalised what was left of the town, causing widespread damage.

THE CARNAGE BEGINS

The Army of the Potomac attacked on the morning of 13 December as the freezing fog was lifting off the Rappahannock. The previous day, Burnside had mapped out to his commanders his strategy of a two-pronged assault. To many of them gathered in his headquarters, this planned offensive seemed overambitious, to others, foolhardy. Burnside was asking his men to advance up steep ground: on the far left of the Union line, Major General William B Franklin's Left Grand Division (some 65,000 men) would lead the main attack, on Prospect Hill, only 20m in height, to capture the positions occupied by Stonewall Jackson's 36,000 2nd Corps. With the Confederates preoccupied on their right flank, General Sumner's Right Grand Division (37,500 men) would then assault Marye's Heights to tie down Longstreet's 38,000-strong 1st Corps, and eventually link with Franklin on the high ground. Joe Hooker's Grand Centre Division (47,000 men) would maintain a defence of the centre and provide reinforcements to Sumner and Franklin where necessary.

> “WE COULD HAVE HAD THE HILLS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER WITHOUT THE COST OF 50 MEN. NOW IT WILL COST AT LEAST 10,000, IF NOT MORE!”

Ultimately, Burnside believed he could sweep up Lee's whole position above the town. Despite fierce arguments from his subordinate commanders, he waived away their concerns. A brigade at a time, Sumner's units now began their funereal march across the pontoon bridges and through the ruins of the town to line up for the coming assault of Marye's Heights. To the south of Stafford Heights, facing Prospect Hill, Franklin established three more pontoon bridges across the Rappahannock to get his own units in place for the expected early morning attack.

However, Burnside's lack of clear orders to Franklin, combined with the latter's inherent distrust of his commander's ability, led to confusion, valuable time lost, and a missed opportunity. Dawn had come and gone, and with it the element of surprise, by the time Franklin received his orders at 7.30am. Burnside wanted his powerful wing of over 60,000 men to carry Prospect Hill with a “division at least”. Instead of a massed infantry assault that might well have overwhelmed Jackson's positions, Franklin followed his order to the letter and sent in just one Pennsylvanian division, commanded by Brigadier General George Meade, comprising just over 3,800 men. Meade had to take a position occupied by almost ten-times that number of Confederates, supported by entrenched artillery.

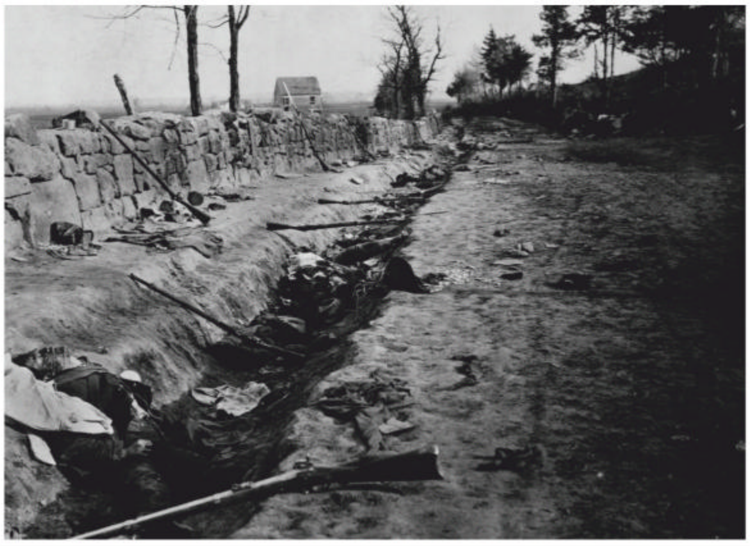
Despite this, the Pennsylvanians acquitted themselves, overcoming murderous Confederate artillery fire as they marched up the elevation, to by chance discover a weak link in Jackson's defences through a marshy wood, where inexplicably the rebel commander had failed to man an 550m line. Meade's opportunist surge into the gap almost caused the rebel line to break, as the survivors of the initial charge crested the hill and caused Jackson to summon heavy reinforcements.

A sustained Confederate counterattack stemmed the tide and drove Meade's men back through ground that would be ominously titled the ‘Slaughter Pen’. Without the promised reinforcements from Franklin, who was more concerned to protect his lines of retreat across the river, Meade was forced to retire by that afternoon with losses to his division of over 40 percent. Further to the north the fighting would be relentless and far more brutal for other Union divisions.

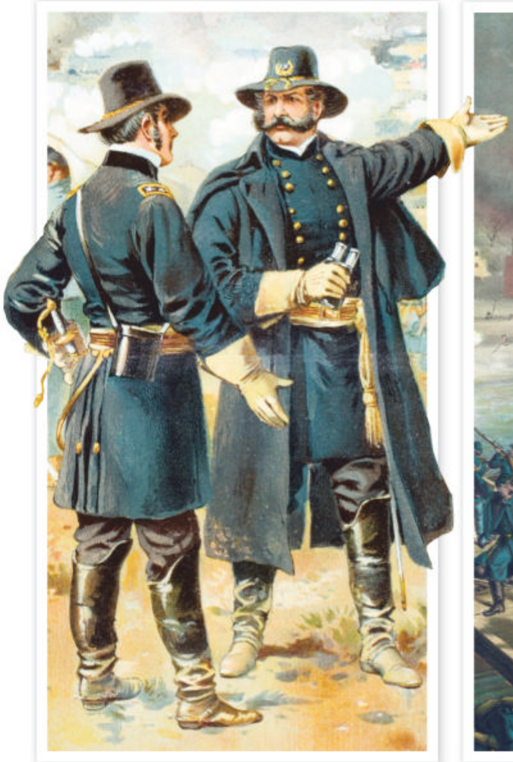
By late morning, Burnside, beset with anxiety at Franklin's failure, directed a main thrust towards Marye's Heights. Sumner was ordered to send “a division or more” to seize the high ground. Sumner's brigades would march out from the relative safety offered by Fredericksburg, navigate a valley bisected by a water-filled canal ditch, and reform their lines before ascending an open slope of 365m to reach the base of the heights.

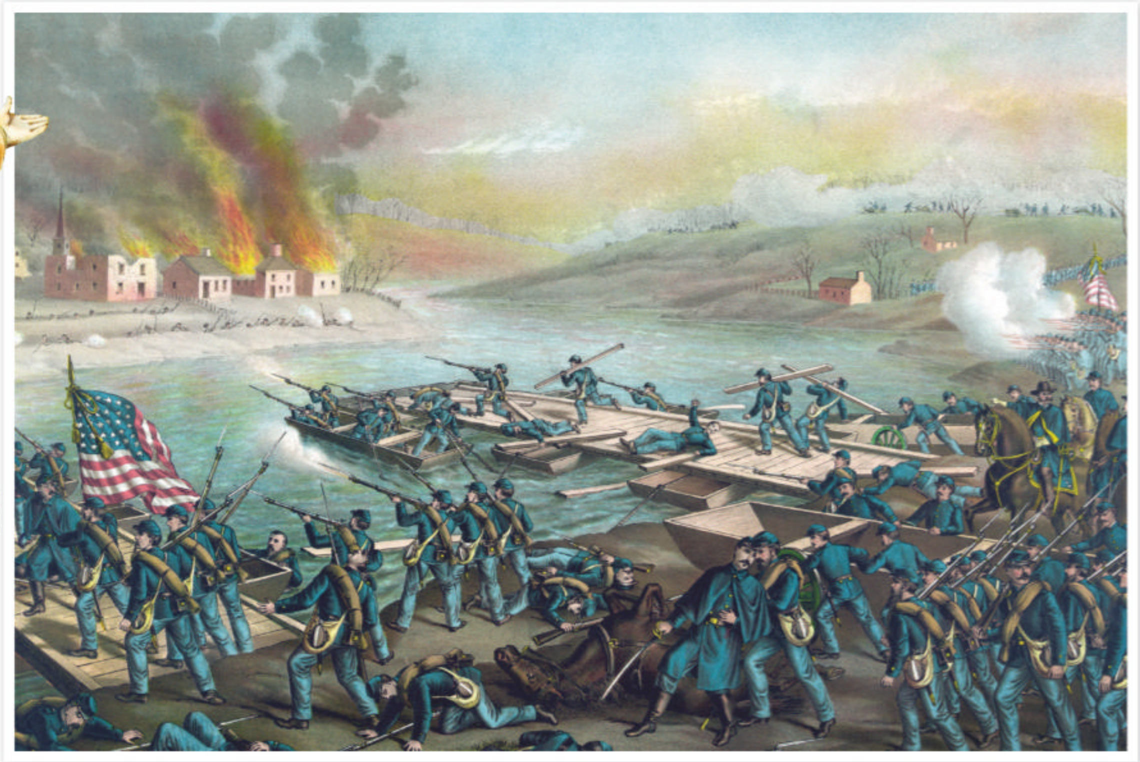
Lee had been concerned as to the strength of Sumner's units that would assault Longstreet's position. But with his artillery bedded in to a strong defensive position, many cannons sighted down onto the plain instead of being hidden behind

BELOW-LEFT The stone wall at Marye's Heights was the scene of carnage



BELOW Brigadier General Joseph Hooker (seated second from right) with some of his officers





the hill. With such firepower at his disposal, and his lines of infantry massed behind the stone wall at the base of Marye's Heights, protected by the sunken road, Longstreet oozed confidence.

"General… if you put every man now on the other side of the Potomac in that field to approach me… and give me plenty of ammunition, I will kill them all before they reach my line," he assured Lee.

His men would prove as good as his word. At noon, the first of several divisions, a brigade at a time, went in, each to face intense artillery fire as they double-timed in rank up to the Confederate positions: across the canal, stumbling over wooden fences, and reassembling in their two lines of battle to continue their assault. All while under relentless Confederate artillery fire. As each brigade marched valiantly in line towards Longstreet's positions, it melted before the firestorm meted out by Confederate riflemen behind the stone wall. It was as brave as it was pitiless.

Throughout the afternoon and towards sunset, Sumner sent in his men 14 times. The most gallant charge of the day was made by the Irish Brigade led by General Thomas Meagher, green sprigs of boxwood in their kepis. They got to within 25 paces of the stone wall before they were driven back by a tempest of rebel fire from the 24th Georgia (also an Irish formation), who cheered their countrymen's heroism as they fell back.

Witnessing the carnage from the rear, Major General Hooker rode to Burnside's headquarters above Stafford Heights to demand a halt in the attack. Suspicious of his subordinate's motives, and knowing Washington expected victory, Burnside ordered the attack to continue until the heights were taken.

By the evening, as the light started to fade and all assaults had been repulsed, the route up to Marye's Heights was littered with the dead and dying – almost 9,000 men. Fredericksburg was still under Confederate artillery fire as Lee continued to hold his positions. Jackson had managed a break in his lines effectively, and Longstreet had kept his word. Not one Union soldier had penetrated his lines that afternoon. Two-thirds of Union casualties that day lay before the stone wall.

AFTERMATH

Distraught at how his battle plans had unravelled so calamitously, Burnside resolved to personally lead the next day's attacks in atonement for the disaster. Thankfully for the officers and men of his old corps, he was talked down by his subordinates. His own misgivings of his unsuitability to command an army had come to pass. Leading yet more men to destruction against Lee's defences would not change the overall strategic outcome, and he knew it. He ordered a withdrawal back across the Rappahannock.

After the battle, the Union dead and dying carpeted the field below Marye's Heights. The survivors lay in freezing temperatures upon the hard ground next to the corpses of their comrades. The sound of Confederate snipers shattering the cries and moans of the wounded. One Confederate, Sergeant Richard Kirkland, would earn the title of the 'Angel of Marye's Heights' as he displayed immense courage in going out into no man's land to give water and comfort to the Union wounded who had been marooned under fire for over 24 hours.

On 15 December, much to his frustration, Lee was convinced no further Union assault was coming. He had hoped to finish the job. Burnside's army had instead retreated back across the river under cover of darkness with the pontoons muffled to soften the noise of men and horses. Confederate skirmishes discovered the enemy's giant encampment in and around Fredericksburg deserted the next day.

Southern newspapers claimed a great victory; Lee's casualties of 5,377 (with 595 dead) were light compared with the Union figure of 12,653 (1,284 killed). But although he had achieved a stunning victory, strategically Lee was aware it did not achieve his goal of destroying the Army of the Potomac. He knew a fresh, newly equipped opponent would come again into Virginia. Sooner or later, he feared, they would find the right man to lead it.

Burnside was determined to remove the stain of bloody, ignoble defeat and sought to continue his offensive towards Richmond, despite the rapidly worsening weather. It was doomed to failure as the winter rains continued; his wagon trains and artillery became stuck in the mud, and his senior commanders plotted his downfall, weary of his inept leadership. He was relieved of command on 25 January 1863 as Lincoln took on the chin the political backlash from his opponents in Washington and continued to look for a Union general who could deliver him victory. ○

ABOVE-LEFT Burnside (right) was a capable corps-level commander but doubted his ability to lead an army in the field

ABOVE-RIGHT Union troops battled to build their pontoons and gain a foothold across the river

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images

WHAT IF...

FRANCO HAD JOINED THE AXIS?

A Spain allied with the Nazis in the Second World War would have ruined the Allied campaign in the Middle East, but doomed the Francoist state to an earlier collapse

INTERVIEW WITH

© J Stewart

JULES STEWART

Stewart is a veteran journalist, reporting from over 30 countries, including Spain where he worked for 20 years. He has published 12 books on a range of subjects including cultural and literary histories of Madrid.

As Hitler's army marched into Poland on 1 September 1939, beginning the war, the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco struggled to consolidate power in Madrid. His Nationalist Army had been heavily reliant on Nazi arms, tanks and planes to gain victory in the Spanish Civil War. Yet Franco did not fall in with the rest of fascist Europe to support the German war effort, instead taking a cautious and relatively neutral approach. The prospect of Spain joining the war remained a concern for the Allies throughout the war, terrified by the prospect of losing control of Gibraltar and, therefore, the Mediterranean.

What was the relationship between Francoist Spain and Nazi Germany during and after the end of the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39?

The first and only personal encounter between Franco and Hitler took place at the Hendaye railway station in German-occupied France in October 1940. A frustrated Hitler later told Benito Mussolini that he would rather have several teeth extracted than endure another meeting with Franco. Hitler had travelled to Hendaye to assess the impact that building a closer relationship with Spain might have on stability in Vichy France. No agreement was reached, simply because Hitler could not accept Franco's demands for handing over to Spain large parts of the French North African empire. That said, Hitler clearly saw Franco as a useful ally for increasing pressure on Britain and diverting part of the enemy's war efforts to the threat of hostilities with Spain. The Nazis provided Spain with arms, tanks, troops and Luftwaffe air support during the Spanish Civil War, which effectively ensured a Nationalist victory. The Germans were eager to test new equipment in the field. Spain also provided a convenient sideshow to distract Britain and France from Germany's skulduggery in Eastern Europe. After Franco's victory, in 1941 he approved the recruitment of Spanish volunteers to Germany on the guarantee that they only fight against the Soviet Union and not the Western Allies. Once the tide of war started to turn against the Axis, Franco, with a wink and a nod, cleverly adopted a policy of 'strict neutrality'.

Was Franco invited or pressured to join the Axis alliance prior to the outbreak of WWII? Why did Spain remain neutral?

Franco's gambit was always to err on the side of caution. Hitler became aware from the outset that the Generalissimo might play the role of a useful sympathiser to the Nazi cause, one worthy of material aid during the Spanish Civil War, but he held out little or no hope of recruiting the country as a belligerent in the European conflict. Franco set far too high a price on joining the Axis and the best Hitler could hope for was a policy of political support from an anti-Bolshevist bulwark south of the Pyrenees. Franco embraced a strategy of ideological support for Germany, while cautiously putting out the message that the Allies would not have to confront a Spanish army in the European war. Maintaining neutrality was essential if the government was to concentrate on rebuilding a country shattered by three years of internal destruction that had left Spain impoverished, with

▶

RIGHT
Franco attends a Condor Legion parade to celebrate victory in the Spanish Civil War

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images

widespread hunger among its people and its economy in ruins.

How much concern was there among the Allied nations that Spain would enter the war, even in a limited way?

There is no evidence of any undue concern among the Allies that Spain would enter the war on the Nazi side. Hitler's failure to bring Britain to its knees and open the country to invasion during the Blitzkrieg, along with the German Army's disaster in Russia, made it obvious that the war's outcome was by no means a foregone conclusion. Yet it was imperative to take all possible measures to prevent Spain becoming a belligerent. From the beginning of the conflict the Allies, mainly Great Britain, deployed a number of policies to prevent closer relations between the Axis and Spain, thereby limiting the likelihood of entry in the war.

The Allies created a system of incentives to condition Spanish policy decisions. The British focused on building a network of mutual interests, thanks to which any breakup between the two countries would mean a key loss for Spanish trade and industry. This was a key factor in conditioning Spanish movements in the war. With the economic agreements in force between Spain and the UK from the autumn of 1940, Spain received products essential to its economic survival, which could only be obtained from Britain and the US. Spain essentially became inescapably dependent on British and Western Hemispheric sources of supply.

What was the state of the Spanish military at the outbreak of WWII?

At the end of the Civil War in 1939, Franco's Nationalist Army consisted of roughly one million troops in 60 divisions. The need to free up workers and farmers to rebuild the country was a key factor in Franco's decision to dramatically reduce the size of the Spanish armed forces to some 250,000 men, most of them two-year conscripts. Once the Second World War broke out, Franco was obliged to consider his country's position vis-à-vis the two sides, as well as the threat of invasion from the Allies – or even Germany if Hitler decided to take control of his country. Thus Franco decided to reverse some of the military cutbacks. In 1942, alarmed by the Allied landings in North Africa, and the German occupation of Vichy France bringing hostilities closer to the Pyrenees, the Generalissimo ordered a partial mobilisation, which raised the number of troops to more than 750,000 men. The air force and navy were also strengthened, although less dramatically than the land forces because of financial restrictions

> WITH THE FALL OF GIBRALTAR THE AXIS WOULD HAVE CONTROLLED THE WHOLE MEDITERRANEAN

ABOVE-LEFT
A Hitler youth visit to the Alcazar in Toledo among Civil War ruins

ABOVE-RIGHT
Adolf Hitler shakes hands with Francisco Franco

If Franco had allied Spain with the Axis, was there a possibility that he (perhaps with German or Italian support) could have successfully taken Gibraltar? How might its loss have affected Allied operations in the Mediterranean Sea in 1940-41?

In a letter written in February 1941 to Franco, Hitler said that an attack on Gibraltar and the closing of the Strait of Gibraltar would have changed the Mediterranean situation in one stroke. The Führer was not alone in this assessment. Winston Churchill went to great pains to ensure that the Rock remained in British hands during the war. If Britain could not be crushed by aerial bombardment, then the country must be strangled into submission. That meant closing the Strait of Gibraltar.

With the fall of Gibraltar, the Axis would have obtained control of the whole Mediterranean, cut off the British Army in the Middle East and closed a whole future theatre of war. It would have dashed hopes of an ultimate Allied victory. Churchill came up with one of the most audacious gambits of the war: the distribution of $13 million in bribes to top-ranking Spanish military figures, who would ensure that Franco adhered to his commitment to neutrality, if necessary by launching a coup d'état.

In all, eight top-echelon officials and a number of well-placed lower ranks were

drawn into the operation. The bribes served their purpose. The recipients neutralised hardliners in the military ranks and Churchill could breathe easier.

What contribution might Franco's forces have made to the Nazi invasion of France? Could it have operated independently or might Spanish territory have been a staging ground for a third invasion route?

Franco never displayed an interest in taking control of French territory, especially once it became obvious that Spain was not going to be granted possession of France's North African territories. The Generalissimo decided unwaveringly against sanctioning a German Army crossing into Spain. The Nazis wanted to use the country as an invasion route to Gibraltar, but Franco knew this would have left Spain open to attack by the Allies. He did contemplate at one point secretly allowing the Wehrmacht access and then raising a diplomatic protest, but this whimsical idea was summarily discarded once it became clear that a German victory was by no means assured.

Had Hitler scored a victory in Britain or Russia, it is possible that Franco would have deployed troops to the Pyrenees to act as a backup for German units. Moreover, there were a significant number of high-ranking Spanish Army officials who strongly opposed Spain's entry into the war.

How might entry into the Axis alliance have affected Spain internally – would there have been a second civil war or an Allied-backed insurgency against the Generalissimo?

Had Spain joined the war as an Axis ally, the short-term outcome would have been catastrophic for the country. Franco was faced with a dire internal situation of near economic collapse, demoralisation and an infrastructure that had been all but destroyed after three years of civil war. With the armed forces in control, there was no risk of a second civil war, yet the country could ill-afford to get involved in another armed conflict.

Longer term, however, the consequences would have been beneficial, in as much as it would have ended the Franco regime, as was the case with the Italian and German dictatorships. Spain would have avoided the political ostracism by the nations of Europe in the post-war years, up until Franco's death in 1975. Spain would have participated in the reconstruction of Europe and become a member of the United Nations and eventually the Common Market. Instead, an increasingly inept dictator kept the country under his tyrannical thumb for 40 years. ○

ALTERNATE REALITIES

SPECIFICS

1939

FRANCO WINS THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

On 1 April 1939, Franco's forces entered Madrid and declared victory. But three years of civil war had left Spain impoverished and the new state was locked in a struggle for survival. Franco had been forced to substantially reduce his military might, cutting three-quarters of the Nationalist Army to free up men to rebuild the nation, and most of the military leadership opposed intervention in WWII.

1940

DEPENDENCY ON THE ALLIES

Britain created a network of economic mutual interest with Spain, meaning Spain would face economic destitution if it cut ties with the Allies. Britain ensured Spain could only receive essential products from the Allies and the US. This prevented Spain from taking action against the Allies. Meanwhile, Spanish military leadership received bribes from Churchill totalling $13 million in order to ensure neutrality.

1940

DENYING THE WEHRMACHT MILITARY ACCESS

Germany was keen to take Gibraltar to enhance Axis power in the Mediterranean, so the Nazis attempted to negotiate using Spain as an invasion route. Franco refused to allow the Wehrmacht access, knowing that any such collaboration would pull Spain into the war.

SPECULATION

1940-42

AXIS DOMINATES THE MEDITERRANEAN

Had Spain joined the war, the British defenders of Gibraltar would have been in an impossible position and would have soon lost control. The Strait of Gibraltar would have closed, cutting off the British Army in the Middle East. Now isolated from the rest of the Allied forces, the nature of the Middle Eastern front would have been transformed and Allied victory would have been unlikely.

1940 onwards

SPANISH ECONOMIC COLLAPSE

With Spain now an Axis state, Britain and the US would have cut economic ties. Repairing Spain's ruined economy and infrastructure would have become nearly impossible, relying heavily on whatever aid they could get from Germany. Yet a second civil war would have been highly unlikely because the Republican Army had been thoroughly crushed in 1939.

FRANCO
FRANCO
FRANCO

1945

THE END OF FRANCOIST SPAIN

After the defeat of the Axis armies, the Spanish dictatorship would've collapsed alongside Mussolini and Hitler's regimes. Instead of enduring Francoist rule until 1975, Spain could've become part of the post-war European reconstruction. It might have joined the UN in 1945 and the European Common Market in 1957.

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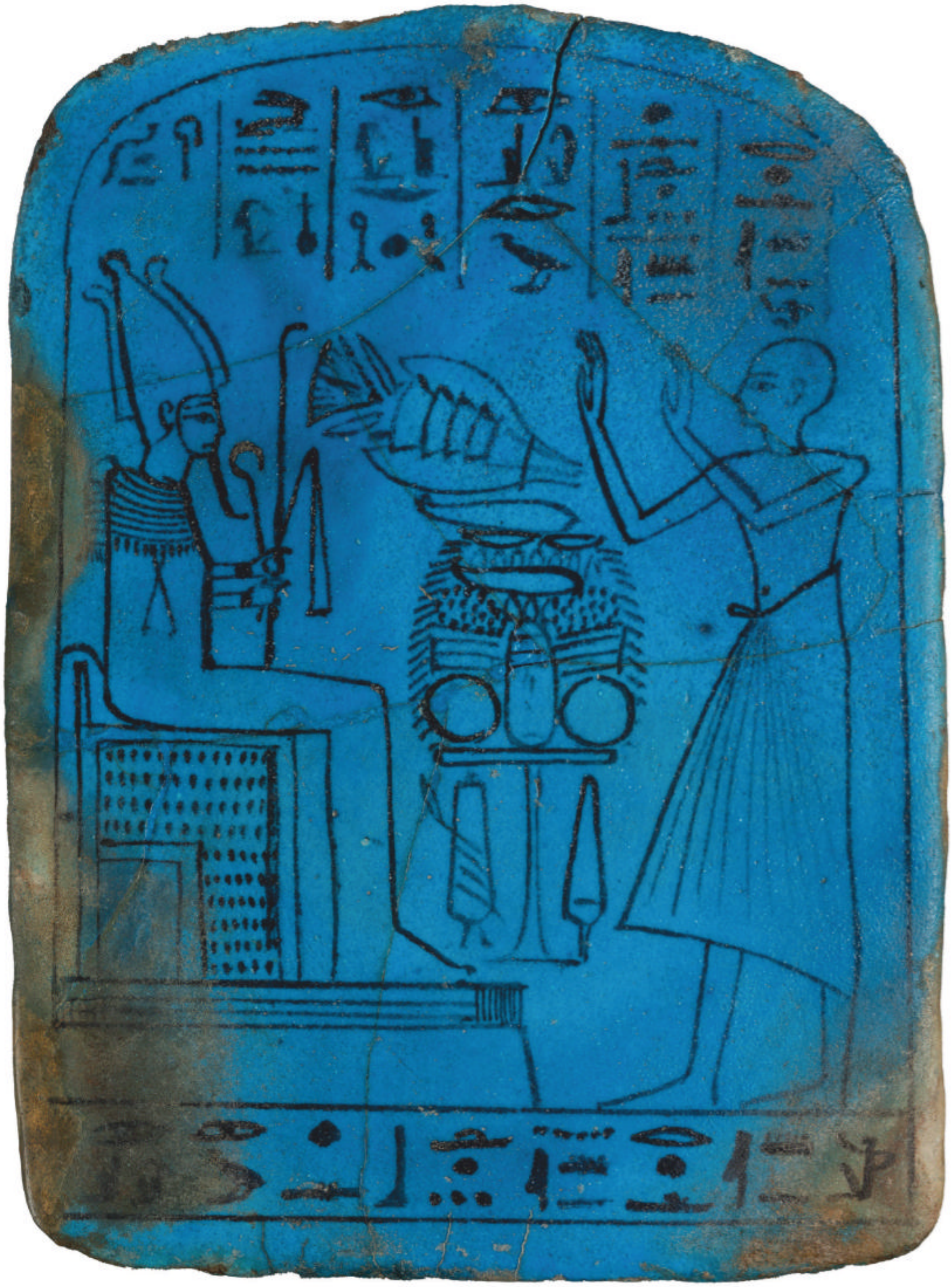


KIND OF BLUE

◀ Rekhamun, the creator of faience (glaze ceramicware) for Amun, is depicted making an offering to the god Osiris. This stela is notable for being decorated using the first synthetic colour, known as Egyptian Blue. The stela dates from about 1295 to 1186 BCE.

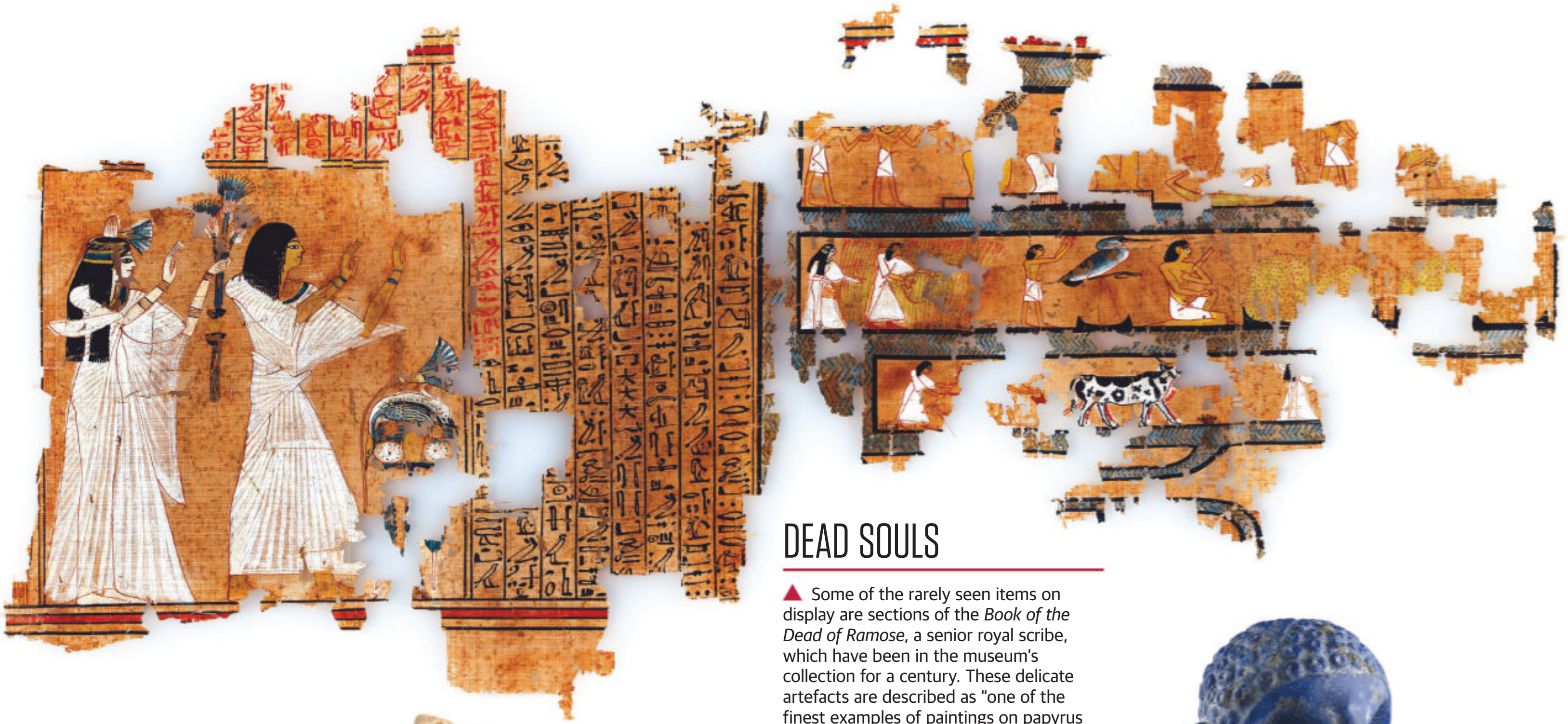
© National Museums Scotland

EGYPTIAN CRAFTS

A new exhibition explores the enduring artistry of ancient Egypt

Of the many ancient civilisations that populated our planet thousands of years ago, it could be argued that the art and architecture of the ancient Egyptians has captured the public imagination like no other. From towering stone pyramids to golden sarcophagi to beautiful papyrus scrolls, the stunning artefacts left behind by the Egyptians reveal so much about the people who owned, commissioned and inspired them. But what about the highly talented individuals who created these objects? A new exhibition at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge sets out to tell us more about them.

The Fitzwilliam Museum says Made in Ancient Egypt will "reveal the untold stories of the makers, technologies and techniques behind extraordinary objects, shedding fresh light on how the ancient Egyptians produced visual forms that remain iconic today." Visitors will be able to learn all about early Egyptian crafting processes thanks to the museum's cutting-edge research using advanced technology such as X-radiography, CT scanning and microscopy. Exploring the identity and techniques of individual craftsmen, the use of fire and raw materials, the role of female crafters and much more, Made in Ancient Egypt looks at Egyptian art from a remarkable new perspective.



DEAD SOULS

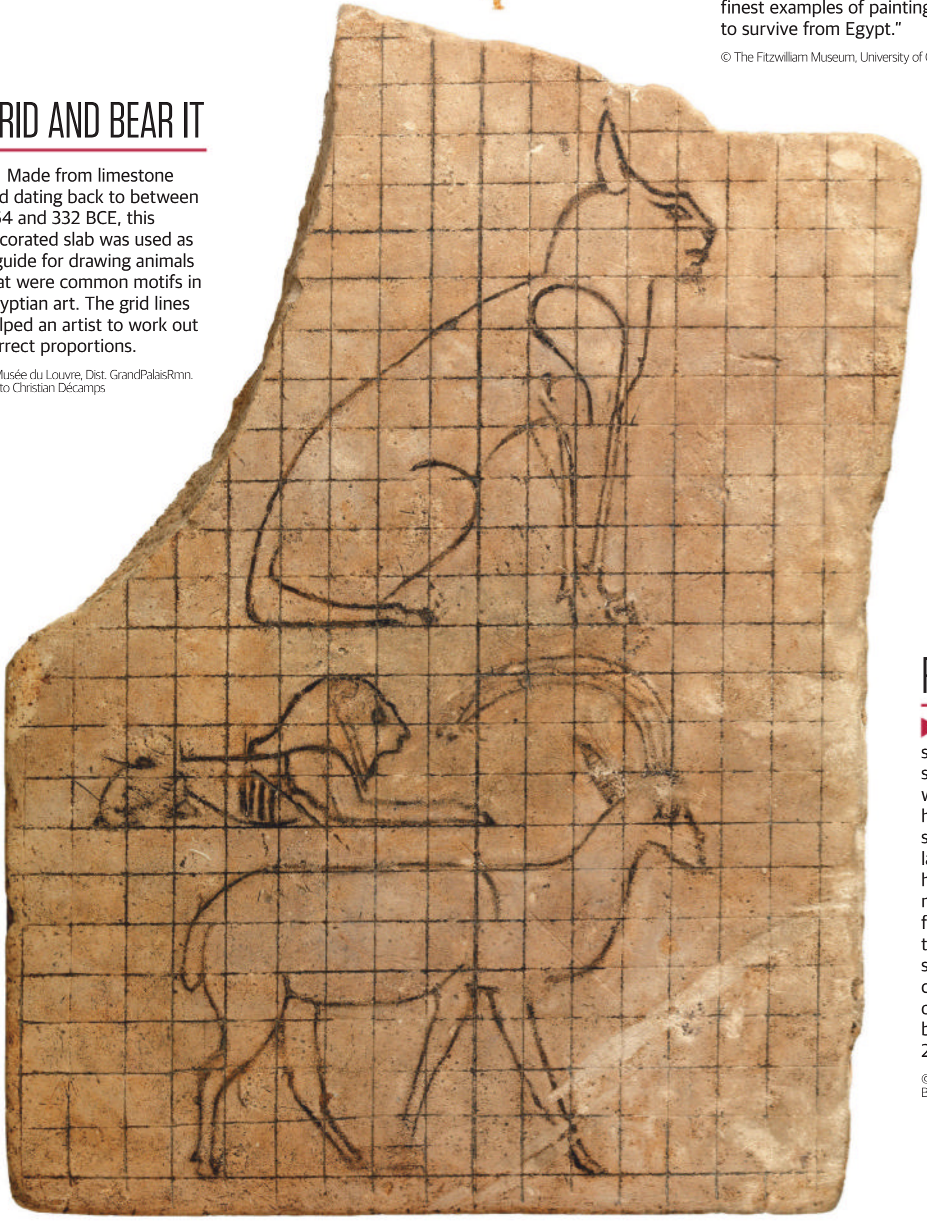
▲ Some of the rarely seen items on display are sections of the *Book of the Dead of Ramose*, a senior royal scribe, which have been in the museum's collection for a century. These delicate artefacts are described as "one of the finest examples of paintings on papyrus to survive from Egypt."

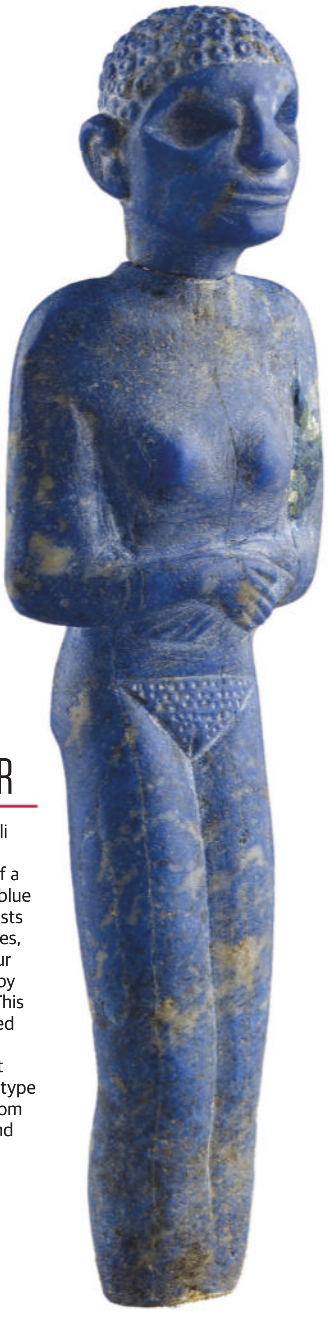
© The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge

GRID AND BEAR IT

▶ Made from limestone and dating back to between 664 and 332 BCE, this decorated slab was used as a guide for drawing animals that were common motifs in Egyptian art. The grid lines helped an artist to work out correct proportions.

© Musée du Louvre, Dist. GrandPalaisRmn. Photo Christian Décamps





ROCK STAR

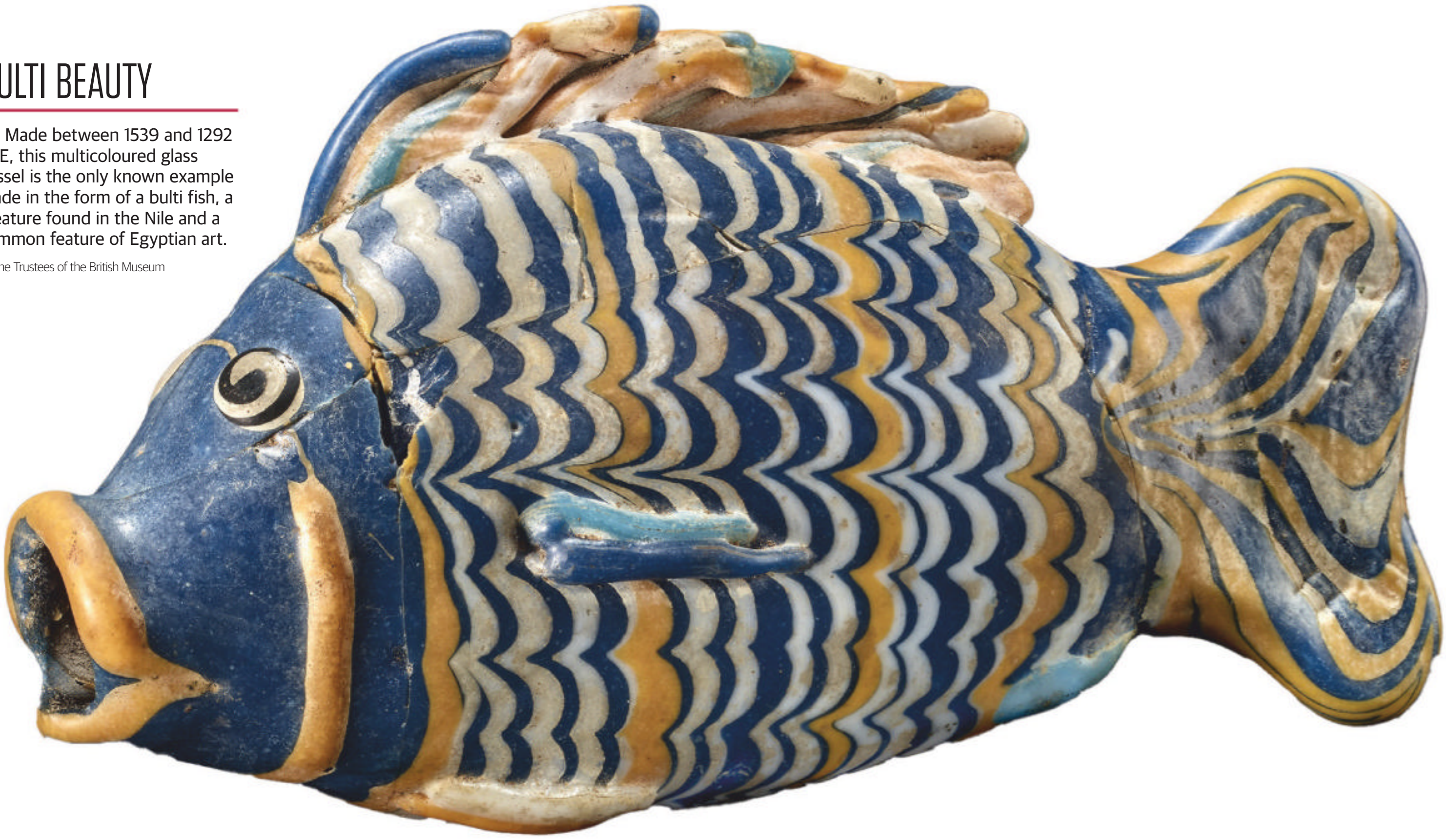
▶ The lapis lazuli stone gives this stunning figure of a woman its deep blue hue. Used by artists since ancient times, lapis lazuli's colour has been prized by many societies. This figurine is believed to be the earliest surviving artefact carved from this type of rock, dating from between 3325 and 2575 BCE.

© Ashmolean Museum/ Bridgeman Images

BULTI BEAUTY

▶ Made between 1539 and 1292 BCE, this multicoloured glass vessel is the only known example made in the form of a bulti fish, a creature found in the Nile and a common feature of Egyptian art.

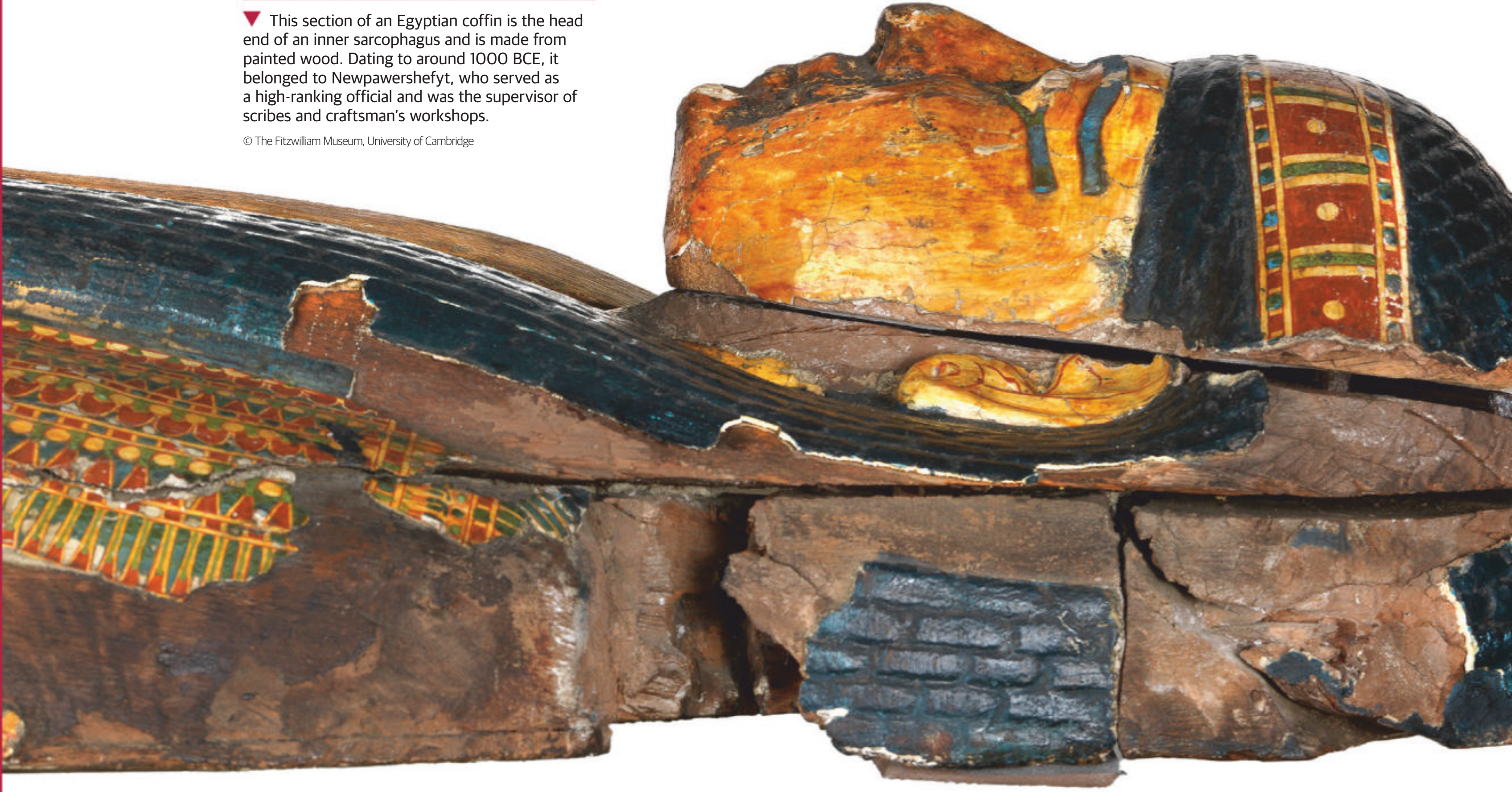
© The Trustees of the British Museum

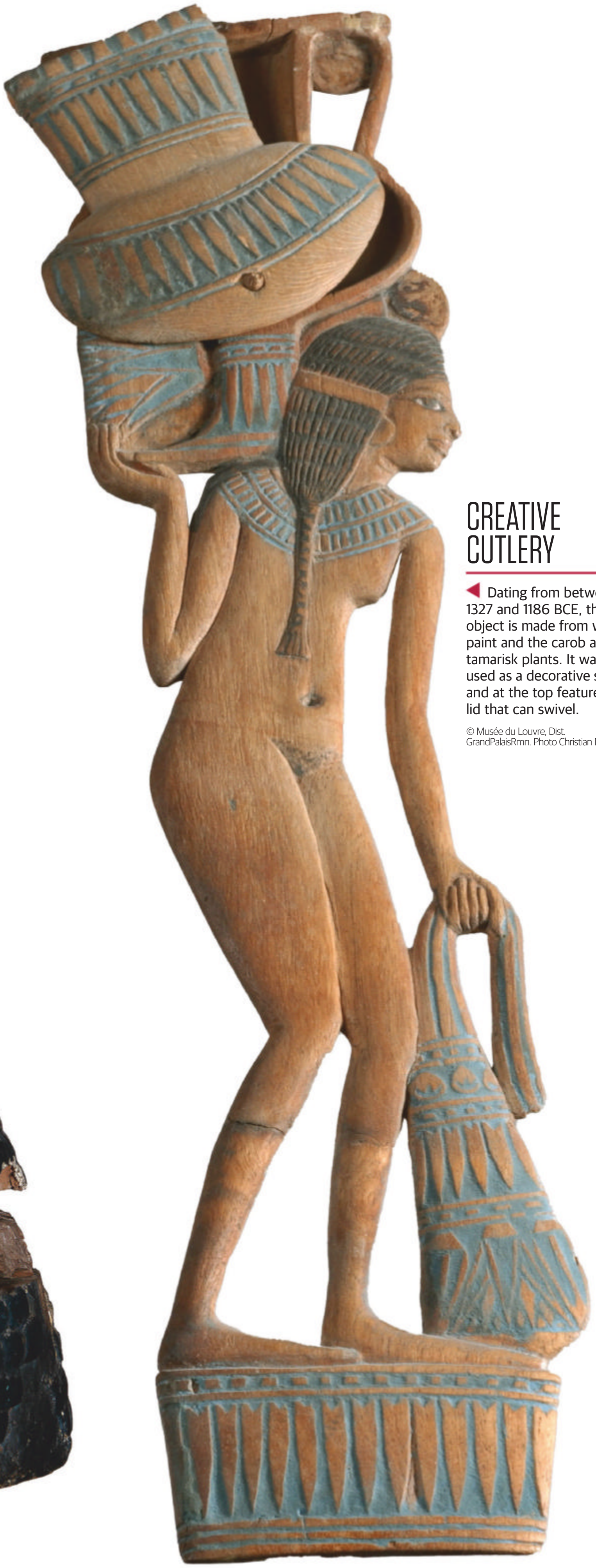


COLOURFUL COFFIN

▼ This section of an Egyptian coffin is the head end of an inner sarcophagus and is made from painted wood. Dating to around 1000 BCE, it belonged to Newpawershefyt, who served as a high-ranking official and was the supervisor of scribes and craftsman's workshops.

© The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge

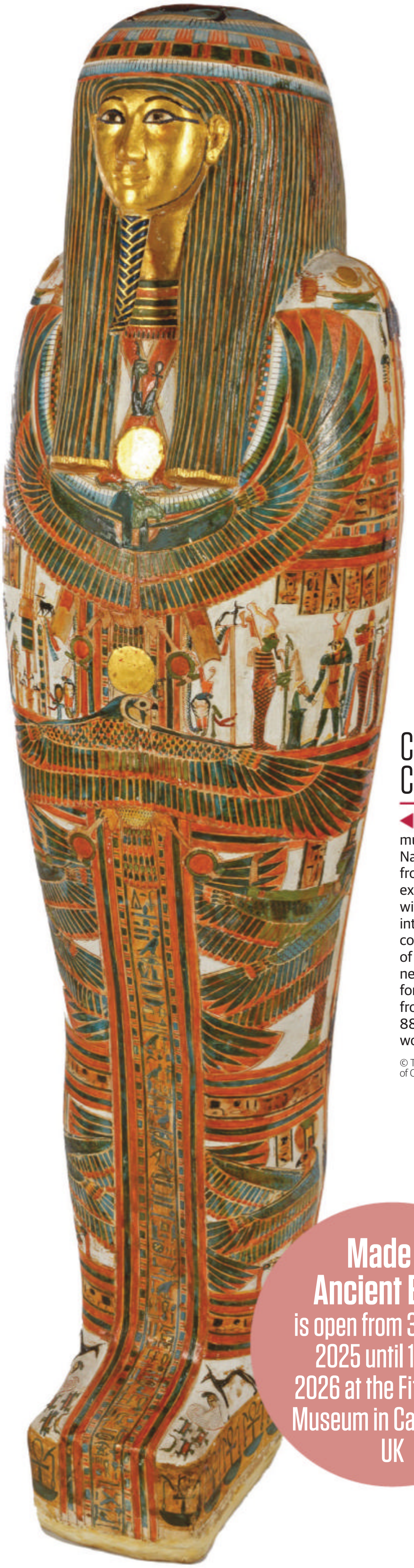




CREATIVE CUTLERY

Dating from between 1327 and 1186 BCE, this object is made from wood, paint and the carob and tamarisk plants. It was used as a decorative spoon and at the top features a lid that can swivel.

© Musée du Louvre, Dist. GrandPalaisRmn. Photo Christian Décamps



CARVED CARTONNAGE

The cartonnage mummy case of Nakhtefmut, a priest from Thebes, is a rare example of a cartonnage with decorations carved into it, highlighting "the complex combination of skills and techniques needed to create objects for eternity." Dating from between 924 and 889 BCE, it's made from wood, gold and glass.

© The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge

Made in Ancient Egypt is open from 3 October 2025 until 12 April 2026 at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, UK

Reviews by Catherine Curzon, Callum McKelvie, Emily Staniforth, Martyn Conterio

CAT TALES: A HISTORY

An archaeological romp through our relationship with our feline friends

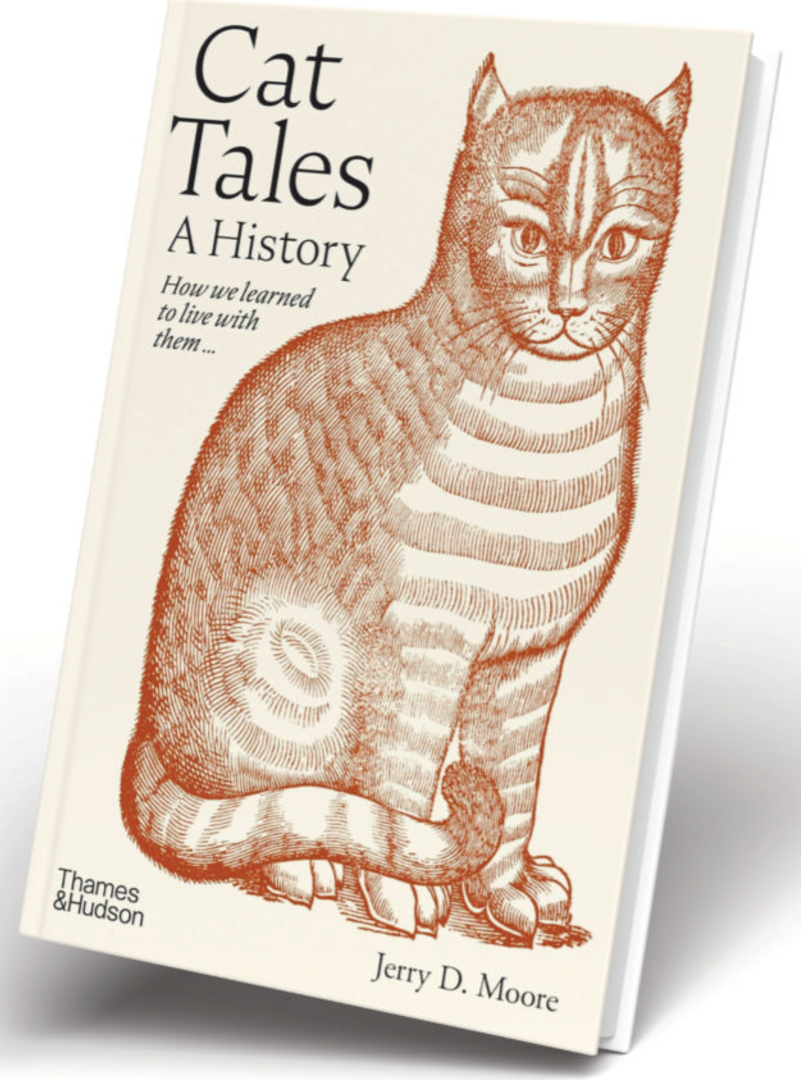
Author: Jerry D Moore
Publisher: Thames & Hudson
Price: £30
Released: Out now

In *Cat Tales: A History*, archaeologist and anthropologist Jerry D Moore takes a deep dive into the long and enduring relationship between humans and cats. The book's subtitle – *How we learned to live with them… and they learned to live with us* – is something that anyone who has ever cared for a cat has doubtless pondered.

The book takes an archaeological perspective and explores the fascinating and sometimes stranger-than-fiction story that has evolved over the last two million years. Within these pages readers will see felines evolve from fearsome foes of mankind to pampered pets, curled up beside the fire. From the awesome power and fury of sabre-toothed cave cats, whose images were painted on ancient walls by our prehistoric ancestors, to the wildcats we still know today, Egypt's veneration of cats, cats sharing the ark with Noah, contemporary house pets, Disney movies and even Joe Exotic, this is a history like no other. It takes us through the centuries and around the world, meeting a host of memorable felines on the way.

In this unusual study of the history of cats, Moore also tells the history of humans. The pages swarm with rats and pests, ring with tales of voyages to new worlds and those of humans finding a way to domesticate their animals, or even, in the case of Siegfried and Roy, bringing big cats to the bright lights of Las Vegas.

The book starts in the mists of ancient history but tracks its story through the era of COVID and beyond, with 40 percent of American households now having at least one cat. And with an estimated 70 million feral cats in America alone, the relationship between human and cat is commonplace – but it has evolved in fascinating ways.

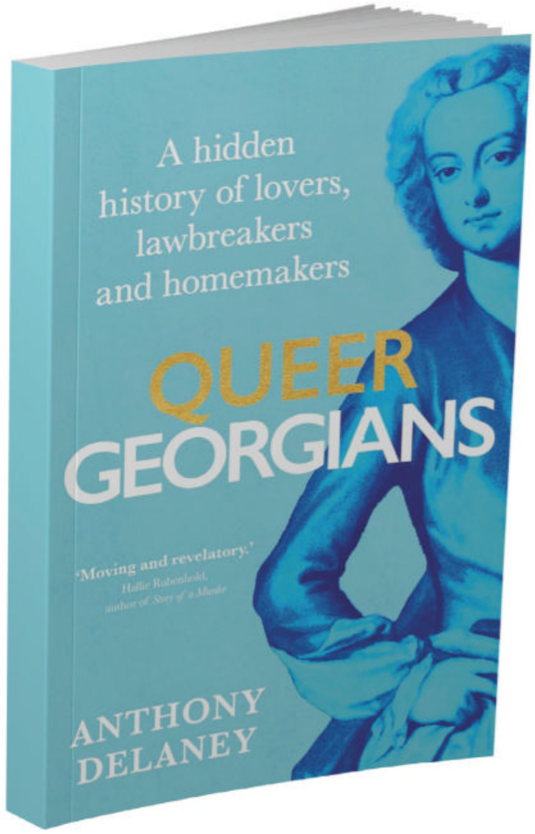


HMS Hermione's cat takes a break from duty, November 1941

© Alamy

Moore examines the changing roles of cats in the lives of humans, from predator to god, before they came to enjoy more prosaic and everyday roles as protectors of crops and grains, and members of the family. The author states that he is by no means an expert on cats but is instead "an archaeologist with cats", and this is perhaps the key to what makes this book so successful. There is nothing dry or academic about *Cat Tales: A History*, nor is it a surface-level read. Instead, it is a fascinating, richly illustrated and highly readable history that will appeal to those with an interest in general history just as much as it will find an enthusiastic readership in people who love their cats to distraction.

As Moore writes in the book: "I have lived with several cats. I haven't understood any of them." It is a sentiment that will certainly be familiar to anyone who has ever cared for a cat and sums up the tone of the book perfectly. And readers will doubtless be keen to learn the answer to a vital, centuries-old question that Moore poses in his text: who domesticated whom? ***CC***



QUEER GEORGIANS

Lifting the veil on LGBTQIA+ lives in the 18th and early 19th centuries

Author: Anthony Delaney
Publisher: Doubleday
Price: £22
Released: Out now

The 21st century has witnessed a reclaiming of queer history, with previously forgotten, overlooked or erased stories at last being retold. However, the Georgian Era, from 1714 - 1830, has received less attention than more recent centuries, despite some individual stories becoming popular - for example the focus on Anne Lister following the 2019 series *Gentleman Jack*. Finally, it has fallen to Anthony Delaney to craft the definitive history of LGBTQIA+ lives during the Georgian era.

In *Queer Georgians*, Delaney creates a rich tapestry of stories that go against the perceived heterosexual and gender norms of the time. Some of the individuals featured may be known to readers versed in rudimentary queer history, such as the Chevalier D'Eon, whereas others will doubtless be unfamiliar.

Through it all, Delaney demonstrates his skill at research, for example relying heavily on court documents to tell the tragic story of Gabriel Lawrence. Yet Delaney never broaches a style that could be called overly academic or, frankly, be seen as dry and dull. He writes with an energy that betrays his love for his subject but is also highly accessible and has a light, occasionally humorous touch, making the book a joy to read.

Anthony Delaney's *Queer Georgians* is yet another extraordinary work of LGBTQIA+ history and can sit comfortably next to other recent books on this topic, such as Peter Parker's *Some Men in London* or Alex Grant's *Sex, Spies and Scandal*. Superbly researched, told in a vibrant style and sure to hold the attention of any reader, *Queer Georgians* is a must read. ***CM***

ELIZABETH NORTON
WOMEN WHO RULED THE WORLD
5000 YEARS OF FEMALE MONARCHY
FOOTNOTE

WOMEN WHO RULED THE WORLD

A fascinating study of historic female royal rulers from across the globe

Author: Elizabeth Norton
Publisher: Footnote Press
Price: £25
Released: Out now

Elizabeth Norton's new book is a masterful study of female monarchy spanning 5,000 years. Exploring the challenges faced by women who dared to rule without the input of men, *Women Who Ruled the World* brings together the stories of powerful individuals whose reigns provide insight into what it means to be a queen. Norton's passion for the subject of female monarchy shines through as she weaves the stories of specific queens to highlight how similar trials and tribulations have been faced by historic royal women from across time and place.

Norton's work discounts some of history's more famous queens, like Eleanor of Aquitaine, due to the outside male influence on her power. Instead she focuses on queens who acted solely in their own name, bringing into the spotlight some remarkable monarchs whose names are less well known: for example Teri'imaevarua II, who was placed on the throne of Bora Bora in 1873 at the age of one; and Athaliah, who claimed the throne of Judah as her own in c.841 BCE.

Expertly telling the stories of seemingly disparate queens in chapters divided into specific similarities, Norton draws convincing parallels between China's Empress Wu and Tudor Queen Elizabeth I, and finds common ground between Merneith of Egypt, the earliest queen regnant in recorded history, and 16th century Aztec queen Tecuichpotzin. This fascinating study reminds us that throughout history women have always been in positions of power and that, as Norton says, "to ignore them gives us only half the story." ***ES***

KING & CONQUEROR

© BBC/CBSStudios/Lilja Jons

KING & CONQUEROR

The 1066 Norman Conquest is retold with plenty of blood and guts

Director: Baltasar Kormákur
Service: BBC iPlayer
Cast: James Norton, Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, Emily Beecham
Released: Out now

Historical fiction is where the truth lies. To dramatise events from nearly 1,000 years ago in a way that appeals to a contemporary audience that might not care about what happened to Britain in the 11th century, the chief creative decision appears to be: sex things up.

Scholars will roll their eyes, of course, but it's a tried and tested way to liven up the past. Modern storytellers also make sure to add oodles of delicious gore. This latter aspect has been a firm fixture in historical films and television since Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* (1995), which featured all manner of beheadings, eviscerations and limb-lopping. It is now an expected part of the package. There must be blood.

King & Conqueror retells, with lashings of imagination, the story of the Norman Conquest of 1066, which every British schoolboy and schoolgirl learns about as part of understanding our national narrative. Usually, it's King Harold ending up with an arrow in the eye that leaves a lasting impression. It is certainly a relevant topic, given the Bayeux Tapestry, a 70-metre long, proto-cinematic embroidered cloth, is returning to English shores as part of a display at the British Museum in 2026 (on loan from the French government).

This new BBC-backed production is clearly influenced by the recent streaming service successes of *Vikings* (2013-21), *Vikings: Valhalla* (2022-24) and *The Last Kingdom* (2018-22). It follows the same aesthetic: telling a fictionalised version of history anchored with a grain of truth, but is mainly all about blood-and-thunder melodrama. It works as a formula, and it is thoroughly entertaining on its own merits, but factual matters tend to ride as a backseat passenger. This is certainly no documentary.

Still, there is some pedigree in front and behind the camera, and it boasts a fine cast: James Norton, Emily Beecham, Eddie Marsan, Juliet Stevenson, Jean-Marc Barr, Clémence Poésy and Nikolaj Coster-Waldau (who played Jamie Lannister in the HBO juggernaut *Game of Thrones*). We can add to this the influence of Shakespeare's tragedies, because, well, British history was a real game of thrones. Or given the amounts of conniving, duplicitousness, slashings, kidnappings and general backstabbing, should that be a game of throats? What does this reveal about the human condition and human behaviour? As Stevenson's Lady Macbeth-like Emma of Normandy puts it, and it's a truism if ever there was one: "Power isn't given, power is taken."

British viewers may also wonder why Kent, where a lot of the action takes place, looks more like Mordor than the 'Garden of England' (a lot of the production took place in Iceland). But that's a small gripe, really, because despite its issues related to historical matters, modern-day swearing, fanciful characterisations of King Harold (Norton), William the Subsequent Conqueror (Coster-Waldau) and peripheral figures, *King & Conqueror* is engaging, well-made and could serve as a gateway to more truthful sources. Isn't that the point of historical fiction? Perhaps. ***MC***

HISTORY VS HOLLYWOOD

SEPTEMBER 5

Director: Tim Fehlbaum **Starring:** John Magaro, Peter Sarsgaard, Leonie Benesch **Country:** Germany **Year:** 2024

ABC's coverage of the Munich massacre changed TV news, but does this film stick to the facts?

"THE BEST THRILLER OF THE YEAR IS ALSO ONE OF THE BEST MOVIES OF THE YEAR"
PETER SARSGAARD
JOHN MAGARO
BEN CHAPLIN
LEONIE BENESCH
SEPTEMBER 5
BASED ON A TRUE STORY
IN THEATRES NOVEMBER 29

B	A
HISTORY	HOLLYWOOD
Well researched, with lots of archive footage to back up the story.	A tense film that poses big questions about broadcast journalism.

OVERALL

A

VERDICT

01 The film follows the Munich massacre, which saw Israeli athletes and staff at the 1972 Olympics taken hostage by Black September. As in the film, it fell on the ABC Sports broadcasting team to show events live around the world, which had never happened before.

02 Roone Arledge (Sarsgaard), Geoffrey Mason (Magaro) and Marvin Bader (Ben Chaplin) discuss if they can or should show someone being shot. This debate really took place. It was agreed they could delay a decision as the cameras that might see it were not broadcasting live.

03 Thanks to their German translator Marianne Gebhardt (Benesch) listening to the German police radio they realise the cops are unprepared for this kind of situation. The translator character is fictional, but ABC did have several German staff working on the day.

04 One of the ABC team, Gary Slaughter (Daniel Adeosun), is dressed in Team USA gear and poses as an athlete to gain access to the Olympic village, ferrying supplies to their camera crew across from building 31 where the hostages are held. This really did take place.

05 Realising the terrorists can watch ABC's live broadcast from the athletes' rooms, police storm the control room and point a gun at Mason, demanding the feed be cut. According to Mason, this is all real as they were showing German snipers getting into position.

All images: © Alamy

RECIPE

SIMIT

TURKEY, C.16TH CENTURY

Serves: 4 **Prep time:** 70 **mins**
Cooking time: 15 **mins**

- **300g bread flour**
- **1 tbsp salt**
- **1 tbsp sugar**
- **4g fast-action dried yeast**
- **150g warm water (add more if needed)**
- **150g sesame seeds**
- **2 tbsp molasses (pomegranate molasses is preferable)**

Often referred to as a Turkish Bagel, simit is a circular snack popular on the streets of Istanbul. Any visitor to the city will find numerous vendors selling this traditional treat to hungry locals. Simit gained popularity during the Ottoman Empire, as its ease of production and affordability made it a staple in the diet of both the rich and poor. The 17th century traveller Evliya Celebi recorded much of what we know about simit's history. He observed that, during the 1630s, Istanbul was home to 70 bakeries producing simit, and 300 street vendors. It's also enjoyed as a breakfast dish, making an excellent accompaniment when served with Turkish tea.

01 Add the flour, salt and sugar into a large mixing bowl. Mix the yeast into the warm water and then add this mixture to the bowl.
02 Knead for roughly 10 minutes, until it forms a dough. Once done, set aside and allow to rise for another 30 minutes or longer if needed.
03 Ensure your sesame seeds are toasted, this can be done in the oven or by frying. Mix the molasses with roughly five tbsp of cold water.
04 Cut your dough into six equally sized pieces and roll them into long sausage shapes. Twist two of the sausages together to form one simit, squeezing the two ends together so they form a ring. Dip into the molasses water and then into the sesame seeds.
05 Leave them to prove for 30 minutes, during this time preheat your oven to 200°C.
06 Place on a baking tray lined with baking paper. Place in the oven and bake for 12-15 minutes.

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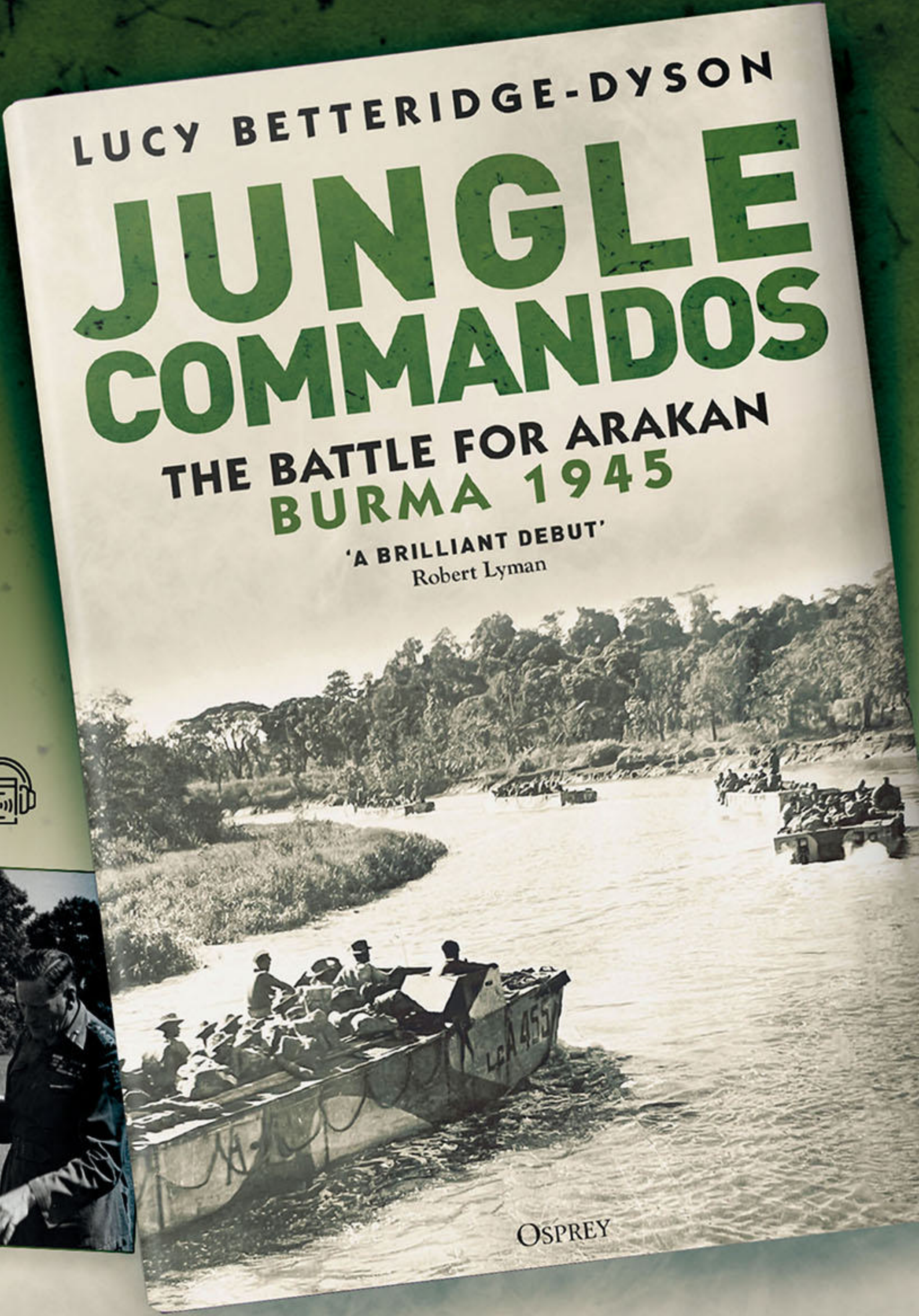
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